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By HELEN B. MATHERS.

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Murder or Manslaughter?

A NOVEL.

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MURDER OR MANSLAUGHTER?

PART I.

"There are in human hearts battle-fields as grand as Thermopylæ, as great as Waterloo."

CHAPTER I.

AT LADISLOES.

SOME eight or nine people are sitting in a circle upon a square of carpet, set in the exact center of the oak floor upon which the Gunpowder Plot was hatched in the year of grace 1605.

It is almost a family party—or appears one—but the women have put on their most swagger stockings and their smartest shoes, though these are invisible, as some officious person has brought a large fur rug and covered up the same, so that all have an absurd air of being tucked up in low frocks, and glazed shirts, and expected to go to sleep, though nothing is further from everybody's intention.

In the great iron cage yonder a royal fire of logs is blazing, away to the left stands the iron-bound chest in which for over a score of years lay the murdered body of a groom, voiceless and deaf in the midst of the life that played around him. In great book-shelves that range well-nigh from floor to ceiling are thousands of volumes, whose bindings are dim with age, but their contents fresh as our latest utterances, as fresh as the love-letters found the

other day by Hetty in the chest—hundreds of years old, but fervent, passionate, adoring, beyond the reach of any modern nineteenth-century lover.

Against the unshuttered window-panes millions of snow-flakes are beating, like ghosts with feeble hands, as if they longed to enter, and sprinkle and shroud the laughing ring of faces around the rug yonder.

"When are we going to begin?" cries Hetty, "and how *do* you begin? It must be quite fifty years since either of us played the game."

"You throw a slipper," began Jemmy St. Asaph, who was the nearest approach to a "fripon" present.

"Wouldn't a pump do?" said Christabel, with an air of innocent inquiry.

"Somebody would be sure to sit on it," said Jemmy, after peeping at his elegant extremities, "and it's hunt-the-slipper—not the pump. Now, Mrs. Booth, you started the game, and you must begin it. But we are all so comfortable"—he stole a look at Christabel, but she was inclining her ear just then to the young man whose dark face, with blue enigmatical eyes, was uncommonly near her shoulder.

"Comfortable!" ejaculated Mrs. Booth, as she sprung up, and, unlatching her shoe, sent it flying in the midst of the company with such vigor that it promptly rebounded from Sir Asaph's head to Chummy's nose, thence to a lady's lap, only to be snatched therefrom, and landed in her brother-in-law's bosom, whence it was rescued by Hetty's nimble fingers, only to start off on wilder travels than before.

Every woman is at heart a romp; she enjoys the evasions, the swift feints, the surprises, the struggle for mastery, and the ardor of pursuit, the *élan* of attack, the subtle joy of resistance, and above all, she loves to *do* you, and look as innocent as an angel while she is executing some sly trick that finally routs you! Now, in "Hunt the Slipper,"

that *may* be respectable, but is never dull; every romping instinct of man and woman comes into full play. You must be alive at every point; not the wink of an eyelash must distract you for an instant from your dogged determination not to be beaten (if you are the hunter), and your equally fixed resolve (if you are the hunted) not to give up the slipper to which you so dishonestly stick.

Sometimes the hunter stands within the magic circle, sometimes without; anon his itching fingers close on the slipper, only to feel it instantly wrenched away. Again he descends with an eage-like swoop that stretches him flat on the defender's body, from which he rises empty-handed, while from the opposite side of the ring the smart *tap-tap* of a high heel on polished boards turns him like a magnet, and, rushing to the spot, he is met only by a lovely smile, as Beauty passes the coveted morsel behind her back! Sometimes it is a narrow squeak, and the slipper flies past his ear far beyond the circle, and, leaping out of it, he is raced neck-and-neck by a defender, and if both are men, they roll over and over in desperate struggle till the slipper flies up in the air, and is pounced upon, and instantly hidden if the defender has gained the victory.

The rug has long ago vanished into space, and lightning glimpses of silken hose might have flashed all too briefly upon the sight, had any of those present eyes for anything but a yellow satin shoe, and the woman who was trying to regain possession of it. Swifter eye and lighter foot no hunter ever had than she, yet, at the end of two lightning minutes, she was empty-handed still, and stood for a moment breathless, in the midst of those who had sustained injuries, more or less grievous, in the detention of her property.

Chummy's nose bore witness to the vigor of her address, while on Hetty's forehead was the red impression of a heel; St. Asaph's braces had gone off like fire-works, while explosions of hooks and eyes, and unripping of seams, had

passed unnoticed in the furore of the game, until the pause in the pursuer gave a moment's breathing time to count up the bruises and damages received.

Hetty, with all her beautiful hair wildly disheveled, was carefully feeling her sides, to make sure whether it were her ribs, not her stays, that had got broken. The quietest person present, who had, against his will, been drawn into the vortex of the game, was passing his fingers over a slightly bald cranium, in search of new bumps, possibly developed by his wife's agency, and turning over in his mind a treatise on the truth of Carlyle's axiom, that England's population consists mostly of fools.

But, as a greater than he had

> "Shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff,
> When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,"

so Mr. Booth paused in the examination of his cranium to observe, with some displeasure, the wife who stood before him. She was twisting one long, loose plait of hair between her fingers, as her eyes searched the faces around for some sign of guilt, but all were innocent as cherubs, and her husband's the most innocent of all, for if *he* did not know the contents of his coat-tail pockets, how should *she?*

"I can wait," she said, and down she sat in the middle of the circle, the shoes of the men and women precipitately withdrawing to make room for her.

One unslippered foot was crossed on the other, and she hugged it, as if lamenting the covering of which the cobbler had cheated her. For the first time her eyes drifted from the circle of faces to the night-blackened window-panes beyond, and a look of yearning, of longing, came into her eyes, and paled her cheeks and lips, while her attitude suddenly became rigid, as if arrested by something she saw beyond, invisible to all others.

You might have slapped the slipper's heel on the ground

by her side a dozen times before she heard you; the bounding, vigorous nymph was gone, and the woman, timid, apprehensive, had taken her place.

It was at this moment that a door at the far end of the vast room opened, and an almost inaudible voice announced, "Mr. Hugo Holt."

Faint as was the announcement, it seemed to explode like a bomb among the company. The hour was so late, the visit so unexpected, the man so famous; and pray what did he at that hour of night in *cette galère?*

A breath of cold wind seemed to rush in and advance with him as he came forward to meet Hetty, who was a perfect hostess first, and a wondering woman second, so that she received him as an expected guest, while Chummy forgot his nose in the welcome that he never failed to extend to every soul, rich or poor, who came within the gates of Ladisloes.

"I was in your neighborhood," said Mr. Holt, "and ventured, though so late, to come in and see you for half an hour."

But, as he spoke, his eyes scanned the ring of faces, and missed one; though he discovered that of Mr. Booth, who was at the moment exploring his coat-tail pocket for a bundle of notes on the Anthropological era, instead of which, to his amazement, he produced the frivolity of —a woman's slipper.

No matter where Mrs. Booth's heart and ears had been a moment ago, her eyes were still about her, and, like an arrow, she darted at her scientific spouse, but only to find his hand empty, while, with perturbed countenance, he searched his *other* pocket, and the game flew on without him.

The new arrival sat down next his hostess, without invitation, and proved himself the most vigilant, audacious player present.

And if Mrs. Booth had hitherto played the game *con*

amore, as she did most things, she now played it with the set, obstinate determination of a demon who was not to be beaten—even by Hugo Holt. Perhaps the noise was less, but the excitement more intense for his advent, which was odd and unusual, and in some occult way influenced the nerves of those present, so that, to parody an old verse,

> 'Each felt, he knew not why,
> More *mad* than he had done before."

All save Mr. Booth, who had roused himself to bow to the new arrival and skip to the fireside, whence he prosecuted those researches for which the future, not the present age, will be grateful. Presently something unaccustomed in the atmosphere smote him chilly, and he looked up to see his wife and Hugo Holt racing each other to where, like an oasis in the sea of oak, showed a satin slipper.

He is ahead of her—he has reached it surely, when at his very feet she seems to fall, and, rolling over and over, seizes it, and,

"Beaten!" she cries, as, dark and stern, he stands looking down upon her.

He stoops, and kisses her hand.

A minute more and the room is empty, or so it seems to a woman who, sitting apart, fits absently on her foot a satin shoe.

CHAPTER II.

> "Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
> Thoughts so all unlike each other;
> To mutter and mock a broken charm,
> To dally with wrong that does no harm."

EDGAR BOOTH stood by the fire-place, an air of disapprobation stamped on his face at the late too liberal exhibition of his wife's silk stockings.

"Who is Hugo Holt?" exclaimed Christabel, as the door closed on Chummy and his unseasonable guest.

"He is one of the most successful men of the day—"

"And one of the most unscrupulous—"

"With the quietest manners—"

"And the most daring ambition—"

"With an enormous income—"

"And a wife who spends it—"

"And so discreet a flirt that he has never been compromised by a woman in his life!"

"He does not give me the idea of a man prone to fall in love easily," said Hetty, who wore an unusual air of meditation as she still sat on the floor.

"He is plain," said Christabel, who had a model of good looks in her own mind that did not resemble Hugo Holt.

"He is beautiful," said Beryl, addressing her shoe, and only her shoe heard it.

"No," said Hetty, "he is not plain. He is grave, certainly, and there is something austere about him—but he looks *grand seigneur*—and there is something in his face that I should like to find out."

"His character, like his face, would require a good deal of hard reading," said St. Asaph, in his pleasant voice; "for even his friends, and they are countless as his enemies, don't understand him."

"But why is he called unscrupulous?" said Christabel.

"He has mastered the fact that a man must either take advantage of the folly of those around him, or he must himself be a fool, and reap the reward of one, to the end of his days. He prefers to master his world, to be rich, which means to be independent; and no doubt the yelping of the curs that run by his carriage-wheels amuses him. He has the temperament that can support hatred but not pity—"

"But it is a highly nervous temperament," struck in

Hetty, cutting short St. Asaph's words; "his hand trembled as it took mine."

"That is no sign of weakness," said Mr. Booth, unexpectedly, "but of an intensely nervous and sensitive organization. He is as brave a fellow as ever lived—and with a demon of a temper," he added, meditatively.

"I have never seen it," said Beryl, who had imperceptibly approached.

"Ask his chief clerk," said St. Asaph, dryly, "when he is almost buried beneath the briefs that his master might accept if he could be in half a dozen courts at once. If the machinery that underlies the vast administration of his business is one hair's-breadth out of gear, woe betide the luckless underling who has caused it!"

"I can not imagine him in a passion," said Berry, coldly; "he is too self-contained—"

"He is never angry," said St. Asaph, "he is simply unapproachable. A cold shade seems to cross his face—that is all."

"But what brought him here to-night?" said the young barrister present; "has anybody of special consequence in the neighborhood committed a murder, and Holt come down to get up the facts for the defense?"

"There is no one lively enough in this neighborhood to commit a murder," said Hetty, shrugging her shoulders; "he probably came in on his way back to town after dining with Lord L——"

"There he found the best company and the worst morals in England," said St. Asaph, "while here"—he glanced around—"he finds a better host, and *all* the moralities."

"You mean that he came to take us as a wholesome corrective to his evening's dissipation?" said Hetty, dryly, as with her arm through Beryl's she led the way down the stairs, and across the great halls, ceilinged, floored, and walled with blackest oak, and all blooming and beautiful with holly, and great boughs of ivy with its darker flower.

"But I know better," she added in her friend's ear; "he came twenty miles out of his way to-night to hunt the slipper with *you*."

"And he did not get it," said Berry, and laughed as they turned into Chummy's study, where jokes and cheerful chat were wont to go by till the small hours of the morning.

But Hetty looked thoughtful as she disposed herself upon the couch always held sacred by herself and Berry when the latter was visiting at Ladisloes.

It was an understood thing that the two had understandings, jokes, secrets, and stories that they must discuss in private, and fine enjoyment they appeared to get out of the same. Perhaps they were aware, too, of the charming contrast they made, though in their dispositions they strongly resembled each other; and it would be difficult to say which was more refreshingly naif in her speech, or showed a more savage simplicity in discussing and going to the root of all matters that came under her discussion.

"If you did not wish me to suspect something, you should have said, 'How do you do?' when he came, and 'good-bye!' when he went," whispered Hetty soon in her friend's ear.

"What should you suspect?" said Berry.

"That you have fallen in love at last—and with Hugo Holt."

"He has fallen in love with me," said Berry, laughing; and her laugh was something good to hear, gurgling as a child's, with a child's mischief and fun in it. "But I'm afraid, Hetty—I'm afraid"—she stopped, and her face changed; she looked over her shoulder as if she saw some grisly specter behind her—"I'm afraid that I am a little in love with him."

Hetty looked at her friend earnestly, and something pure and virginal in her figure, in her eyes, struck her. There was a quiver in the little apple in Berry's upper lip

that suggested rather a girl on the brink of her first confession than a woman years married, who had always shunned flirtation, and whose motto had been: "*He comes too near who comes to be denied.*"

"Where is the governess?" said Chummy, approaching with the tumblers he had been mixing.

"She dined not wisely but too well," said Berry, in an undertone. "Did you not more than once during the game see her supporting your brother-in-law's head on her shoulder? But how can you blame her? You know he can only hear when you speak to him on the top of his head!"

But the flippancy of her words did not disguise a certain weariness in her voice and air that attracted Mr. Booth's attention, and he crossed over to pat her head fondly, then allowed her unusual dejection to slide into the more interesting subject of the pathology of the human race.

"How they are laughing over there!" exclaimed Berry as he moved away, and she looked across to the corner of the room where Christabel turned a face like a petulant white flower alternately upon her right and left adorer.

"It is about a little boy," said St. Asaph, rising and approaching his hostess. "He was about six years old and suffered tortures from toothache. He was taken to a dentist and four or five teeth were removed. He bore the agony like a man and never made a sound. When it was over he got down out of the chair and looked up at the dentist. 'D—n you!' he said, and walked out."

"It's very good," said Hetty, when she had recovered herself; "but I'll tell you something nearly as good. Chummy was asleep one Sunday afternoon, and some bores came down from town to call. They most particularly wished to see him, but I assured them that he was not to be disturbed. 'Let Lola go and see if he is awake?' they pleaded, so I let her go. She came back, stood in the middle of the room, and said in a loud, distinct voice,

'Daddy's sound asleep.' Then she came up to me, and in a terrible whisper said, 'That's what he *told* me to say!'"

Jemmy St. Asaph skipped back to Christabel under cover of the laughter that followed, and Llewellyn Poore got up and sat down a little nearer the sofa. Only an acute observer might have seen that he was studying Mrs. Booth, and have wondered why he suddenly found her so interesting. Perhaps he was looking for a reason why Hugo Holt had come there that night, for that the great man had done so without a purpose was incompatible with Hugo Holt's shrewd practical character. As a pleader he displayed no flowers of ornate speech; he saw his road straight before him and pursued it to the end, unswayed by sentiment, and untouched by regard for the feelings of others. Too busy for romance, too canny to allow unprofitable pleasures to interfere for a moment with his success, it was quite in his way that he should affect to admire a woman who, like himself, had succeeded young, but who had failed from a money point of view as signally as he had succeeded.

She would swell the circle of notabilities at his table, as she would adorn it with her grace, but somehow Mrs. Booth did not suggest the idea of lending herself so easily to gratuitous adornment to an admirer's state.

She was rather a woman "who mocks herself at you," to translate literally a French phrase, and she was perfectly sure of herself and her position, and supremely indifferent to the *banal* compliments that she heard every day in town. She had succeeded so young, so easily! She was so triply blessed with the dower of youth, genius, love, that fortune seemed outlavish when she threw beauty also into the scales, and gave at least enough wealth to keep that beauty undimmed by a daily struggle with pounds, shillings, and pence.

And when at last the party broke up for the night, Llewellyn Poore had come to the decision that if Hugo

Holt had really fallen in love, he was likely to get the worst lesson he had ever had in his life, at the hand of Beryl Booth.

CHAPTER III.

"I looked to heaven and tried to pray,
But or ever a prayer had gush't,
A wicked whisper came and made
My heart as dry as dust."

THE men had spent the following days in snipe-shooting, that is to say, the whole of the day in walking after snipe, and the whole of the next in recovering from their exertions.

On the second day, when the snow had cleared away from the ugly Essex flats, Hetty and Berry put on cloaks and hats, and sallied forth into the garden, all unworthy of the stately Elizabethan house that far and wide was known as Ladisloes. But Hetty was an ardent gardener, and wont to fire the outdoor servants by her own example, so behold her now throwing back her cloak to seize a spade, while Berry flaunts a pickax; and while their bones and stays creak responsive, together they attack a long, low mound of earth, half leveled before Christmas had come to interrupt the work.

Christabel has disappeared with her swains, and Chummy, nearly as much in love with her as they are, has followed. No one has seen a newspaper for four days, and they are bound to the nearest village where there is a public-house, and in that public-house they will find a paper, and there they will drink small beer and read it, and bring home the news it contains in their heads.

Edgar Booth is lodged so warmly in the bosom of Science that he does not feel the coldness of his feet as he sits reading in the library, so full of jocund din and mirth some fifty hours ago.

And Berry and Hetty are *tête-à-tête* for an indefinite time, and Berry knows that her moment has come. In vain she has shirked odd opportunities for special gossip, in vain she has cut short their half-hours before the men came up at night, in which Hetty visited her dressing-room, finally disappearing with a long wake behind her of bustle, plaits, hair-pins, stays and ornaments, as Edgar Booth, fair and handsome, made his appearance, too abstracted to observe anything uncommon in his hostess's appearance.

"Business first and pleasure after, as the man said who kissed his wife first, and buried his mother-in-law after," said Hetty, after five minutes' toil that flooded her cheeks with carmine, and loosened all the bright hair about her brow.

"What is the pleasure?" said Berry, leaning on her pickax and looking a little paler than her wont.

A chilly wind was blowing up from the distant marshes. Far away could faintly be heard a Woolwich gun, and if there had been no mist, you might have dimly made out the topmasts of the great ships as they passed down the river. Involuntarily she shivered, and somehow she never thought of Ladisloes again with its armies of roses, or its great tiger-tinted sheets of wallflower, but as it looked then as she waited for her friend's reply.

But she did not get it immediately, for Hetty had turned aside to harangue Howtyego and Thorowgood, two two of her gardeners, and Berry endeavored to stifle a smile—as with exquisite dignity and a hat cocked rakishly over one eye, Hetty instructed them upon subjects of which she was entirely ignorant. Having dismissed them with the natural air of an empress, she had leisure for Berry, on whose face she discovered some traces of enjoyment, and into the causes of which she promptly inquired.

"Hetty!" said Berry, "you are delicious. One minute you are Mrs. Malaprop, the next you are a princess. But

there is always a lovely simplicity about you; and if there was one woman in the world whom I would trust with a secret, it might be you."

"Have you one?" cried Hetty, startled.

"Perhaps."

"Oh! there is no guilt there!" exclaimed Hetty, looking earnestly at her companion's blooming face, and tucking Berry's hand under her arm, they moved forward upon the prowl she had been meditating.

"No," said Berry, "and there never shall be!"

Did not the words, the look, the chilly atmosphere, come back many a time in the future to Hetty when dark seas of crime and dishonor rolled between her and the woman who spoke?

It was Hetty who shivered now as they took their way along the graveled walk that formed a huge square and shut in the formal flower-beds and all the glories that she fully intended to be visible next spring.

At present all was an arid, sodden waste, and not a bee ventured out of the wooden box that, well swathed and protected, stood at the sunniest angle of the wall. Once Beryl had looked in, and the writhing, ceaseless convolutions of the orange and gold bodies had appalled her—it all seemed so useless, so blind in its labor and result, and she dreamed of them that night.

"Let us go to the rooks," said Berry, and they went, finding them presently in the long avenue that led to the house.

Only a few were uttering their soothing caw! caw! but in the leafless boughs above were resting last year's nests. Rooks are the finest conservatives in the land; they never build on the grounds of a *nouveau riche;* a place must be hundreds of years old or you will not find them near it; and if the ancestral owner lets his acres to a vulgar fellow, the rooks will desert it so long as he is there.

"And now," said Hetty, stopping suddenly, "you will tell me all about it."

"What is there to tell?" said Berry.

"Only that you have changed—that you are secure and insolent in your pride of youth and fame no longer!"

"Was I ever insolent?" cried Berry.

"A little. And you kept men at arm's-length always. You were perfectly charming to them; they never knew that they *were* kept at arm's-length; but you found it quite easy to be virtuous, since you had suffered no man near enough to tempt you."

"No," said Berry; and if her voice was gentle, her looks were proud. "I did my frisking when I was young, and do not wish to imitate those modern Helens who begin seriously at thirty-five, and leave off at sixty."

"But you are not thirty yet," exclaimed Hetty, "and you are tempted at last. And it is only metal that has been tried seven times in the fire that is proof!"

"I have been tried six at least," said Berry, with a laugh that had a touch of rue in it, "and I am not afraid that I shall fail at the seventh. Hetty"—she stopped short in her walk and looked earnestly at her friend—

"I can't talk over my husband—even to you. It suggests two washer-women drinking tea out of saucers with their elbows on the table—but you know how careless he has been—a pat on the head now and then, a kind word always, but entirely wrapped up in his own thoughts and pursuits, never noticing if I am sick or sorry, never even looking at the work I do. And for years and years I have said to him, 'I shall fall in love one of these days—oh, I know I shall!' But oh, Hetty, you must have fallen *out* of love with one person before you can fall into it with another. There is no room in a full heart for another passion—and I suppose that mine was empty without my knowing it—"

She paused, and her voice broke.

"But whose fault was it, Hetty—*whose?*"

"*His!*" said Hetty, sternly; "a man had far better care for a woman's heart and soul than for her body! I would rather live in a pig-sty with a man who studied and cherished me, than in a palace with one who hung me with diamonds and did not try to understand me. But when did you meet *him?*"

"It was on business for my husband that I first saw him. As he took my hand, a shock ran through it to my heart, but he did not feel it; his face was grave, inscrutable, as he questioned me. I had not even grasped his features, his expression, when I left him; but, bit by bit, memory reproduced his face, and when I was working, or when I lay awake between the night and morning, I saw him."

"But how often did you see him in the flesh?"

"Hardly ever, and only twice alone."

"It is only a fancy," said Hetty, "and it will pass. You are too tough to take anything more than a caprice."

"No," said Berry, "it will not—it will grow. I struggle, I fight against it, but his dark face comes between me and the sunshine, between me and my prayers, and I can only see, and remember him, and long to see him again. You know how good I have been," she went on with still that touch of rue in her voice, "how I never flirted, perhaps because I knew how little truth and sincerity there would be in the vows of any man who chose to fancy that he admired me. I was sometimes shocked, startled, by things said to me at dinner-tables or balls, but no one ever said them to me a second time; and I have always scorned those foolish, weak women whom I met every day who had been unhappy in their husbands, and, unable to live without sympathy, had taken a lover. This man is not my lover—he never will be, but he has crept into some empty chamber of my heart—and he will stay—"

"No! he will not; you will change," said Hetty; "the

fever will wear itself out, and you will be yourself again. In every woman's life there comes such a crisis as this—"

"Then you had yours?" cried Berry, turning her eyes on Hetty.

"Perhaps; but remember this—that he will forget, while you remember. It is the law of our existence that we are something, anything, nothing to the man we love, while *he* is—everything. Even if he loves you, remember this: *Il y a toujours une autre*—so make yourself that other if you can."

"That is what I should like to be," said Berry, her hands tightly folded on her restless heart. "I only want to see him sometimes, to hear his voice—but I feel no longing for him to love me; I do not desire that he should be happy through me; my love is selfish, it feeds itself, and demands no sustenance from him. I know no more of his nature, his disposition, his heart, than of the merest stranger's; so that it is a piece of pure madness—"

"That you know uncommonly well how to hide," said Hetty dryly; "for I must confess that you did not show many signs of surrender the other night, or of the self-effacing attitude of worship that you mention."

"I knew when he came," said Berry, "for the room was full; and I knew when he went away, for the room was empty."

"And how do you suppose he will read these signs that you are aware of his presence?" said Hetty; "it is a bad thing for a man to know he has complete control of a woman's heart—it is more than common and less than cheap, when it falls into his lap so easily."

"Has it fallen?" said Berry; "I don't know. I may love him, but that is nothing to him. If he loves me—" She paused.

"What then?" said Hetty.

"It would be just the same," said Berry; "we are for

ever divided—and so, perhaps, I am less guilty than I seem."

"My dear," cried Hetty, "give it up—it will only end in misery—you can't alter men's natures, and you can't alter ours. All men should love—but no women. *They* have the joys, we the penalties, of success. And in a year's time, Berry, you will have forgotten it all, and found out that home ties are strongest—as *he* has found it out ages ago!"

"I hope so," said Berry, "but from what I have heard, I should not think his wife was any sort of companion to him."

"What is she like?"

"I have never seen her. We have exchanged cards more than once, but never met—however, we dine there next week."

"Don't betray yourself!" cried Hetty.

Berry laughed.

"I am not more afraid for my self-control than for his. And I think he has most self-control of any man I ever knew."

"That argues immense strength."

"Yes," said Berry, in a dreamy tone, "he must be very strong, or he could not influence me as he has done. But, Hetty, since last night, I am convinced that in some way you will have a great influence over my fate."

"If you mean that I shall try and save you from Hugo Holt, I certainly shall have that influence," said Hetty warmly. "My dear child, why couldn't you fall in love regularly every year, or every month, like any other woman of fashion? But to take it in this violent form is—dangerous!"

"I am not a woman of fashion," said Berry, "and I should never come to you to save you from myself—no one can do that for another person. But, last night, in my sleep I got up, crossed the corridor, and knocked at your

door. You did not answer, and I woke up shuddering and shivering in the darkness, and argued with myself a long while; then I seemed to remember that I had been walking in my sleep, and I groped my way back to my room. But even then I knew that some awful necessity, some urgent dread, had sent me to you—that I had gone to you to be saved from—Hugo Holt."

Berry's face was very pale in the morning light; the sadness in her eyes, the sweetness of her mouth had never shown more vividly than then; she looked like a woman predestined to doom, but to an innocent one, not a guilty.

"Can't you get over it?" said Hetty; "and, after all, it is only animal magnetism, and as long as you keep out of his sight you are safe."

"No," said Berry, "I am safe in his presence, but out of it, he draws my thoughts, my soul, my very body to him."

"And do you draw his?" said Hetty.

"No—I seldom see him in my sleep. But if I do, his face and voice are as vivid as if I saw him with my living eyes. And I wake up to find myself beside a peacefully snoring husband—"

"Dull, but safe," said Hetty.

"And I curse myself for a wicked woman, and I pray—but it doesn't help me; though lately, Hetty, I have prayed for *him*."

"He needs it," said Hetty, emphatically; "for though he may be a very brilliant man, I don't believe he is a good one. Of course, the more wicked a man is, the more delightful he is—but his delightfulness costs us women too dear. And, my dear, we have an old proverb in Somersetshire about lovers—'By keeping them off, you keep them on.'"

"Then, hadn't I better encourage him a little, so that he may be frightened away?" said Berry, with a flash of

the dare-devil light in her eyes that had been there when she played hunt-the-slipper.

"Certainly, if you can keep your head cool. The moment he finds that you are like the other women that he meets every day, your charm will be gone, and he will leave you in peace."

Berry did not answer; she had turned her head aside to listen to a sweet little voice that came each moment nearer, singing the following ditty:

"*Up* she took her *little* crook,
Determined for to find 'em;
She found 'em *indeed*—
But it made her heart *grieve*,
For they'd all left their tails a-hind 'em!"

Berry snatched up the child and hid her face in his dimpled neck.

"If my child had lived there would have been no room in my life for Hugo Holt," she said, but not so low but that Hetty heard her.

CHAPTER IV.

"With open eyes (ah, woe is me!)
Asleep and dreaming fearfully;
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
Dreaming that alone, which is—"

It had come to an end at last, and if I had been a Boswell, I should have liked to walk behind these young people and duly chronicle their smart sayings and doings; also the many *bêtises* and acts of folly they managed to perpetrate within the space of five days.

But there had been no fun so fast and furious as on the night that they played hunt-the-slipper, though sly allusions to it had been made every day, and with special reference to the color of Mrs. Booth's stockings. "It

was only because they were *white* that anybody noticed them," she would declare; "if they had been black, like Christabel's, *no* one would have seen them!"

And now they were all assembled at the open house-door, and the last adieus were being spoken.

"The happiest Christmas and the most high old time I ever spent in my life," said Jemmy St. Asaph, as he bowed over his hostess's hand.

"We can never hope to spend such another," said Llewellyn Poore, in his earnest, sincere voice; but he was looking at Christabel, who was also looking at him, but meditatively, as if she had not quite got to the bottom of his blue eyes, but intended to, some day.

"Never!" said Berry, as with an April shower of tears splashing down her face she kissed Hetty, to whom she clung with something more than the mere ordinary regret of a short parting.

And now they are off at last, Chummy, perfect host and best of good fellows, taking the reins, and so by degrees they dwindle down the avenue and so out of sight.

When they had quite disappeared, Hetty and Christabel went slowly back to the drawing-room—perhaps the most beautiful out of all the Ladisloes apartments—and sinking opposite each other into deep easy-chairs, sighed.

"Which are you sighing after?" said Hetty, forgetting herself, as usual, in her neighbor's woes.

"Neither. And for whom are you?"

"For Berry."

"She will not sigh for herself; in town she has no time."

"Yet she has snatched a moment in which to fall in love," thought Hetty, but aloud she said, "The servants have got up an absurd rumor again that the ghost is abroad. Something was seen last night, and this morning they are terrified to walk about, frightened of their

shadows. I am just going to get to the bottom of it," and she rang the bell.

All the servants at Ladisloes had delightful manners, and the woman who now appeared was no exception to the rule.

"There is some nonsense being talked about a ghost appearing last night," said Mrs. Cholmondely, "who set the story afloat?"

"I did, ma'am," said the woman, very respectfully.

"And what did you see?" inquired Hetty, sharply, "or what did you *think* you saw?"

"A tall, white figure, ma'am, that stood close against the wall beside me—"

"Oh!" cried Hetty, throwing herself back in her chair, "it is too ridiculous! How many times have I told you that at certain times of the year, when the moon is in a particular quarter, a shadow is thrown on the wall—a white shadow—that looks exactly like a woman with her arms lifted."

"Yes ma'am," said the servant, respectfully, "and I have been now with you some time, and I have seen what you describe, and as I knew when to expect it, I was never frightened; and when I got up and stood between the wall and the window, the figure vanished."

"And why did you not get up last night?" said Hetty, in an aggrieved voice.

"I could not, ma'am, for I knew at once this was something—different. I seemed frozen to where I lay, and dared not even turn my head; but soon I heard a long, heart-breaking sigh, and then a sort of whisper, 'Where shall I hide it—where shall I hide it?' Then the arms were lifted above me as if seeking some hidden place in the wall—and then, ma'am, I fainted, but when I came to myself, I was alone."

"A practical joke played on you by a fellow-servant," said Hetty, who had gone a little pale; "but one more

such joke played in this house, and the person upon whom it is perpetrated—goes."

She made a slight gesture of dismissal, and the woman, who was also very pale, retired.

"Kirsty," said Hetty, bounding up in her chair as the door closed, "what does it all mean? The woman was speaking truth, and there *is* a secret cupboard just above her bed—Berry and I peeped into it only the other day—it opens and shuts with a spring." She paused abruptly, struck by a certain thought: "Could it have been Berry—she walks in her sleep, and we had been talking about ghosts and the haunted room before we went to bed last night—but what should she want to hide *there?*"

"Nothing," said Christabel, practically, "and how should she get over to the servants' quarters? The woman had indigestion and dreamed it all."

But Hetty did not hear her. She had begun to run, and did not stop running till she had reached the haunted room, when she jumped upon the bed, and pressed on the spring of the almost invisible cupboard door in the wall.

But the cupboard was empty—only cobwebs and the dirt of ages clung to the fair arm that she swept again and again round its interior.

CHAPTER V.

"What sudden chance is this," quoth she,
"That I to love must subject be,
Which never thereto would agree,
But still did it defy?"

"HE is very good-looking," said Hugo Holt, at his own dinner-table, and addressing his left-hand neighbor, who was Mrs. Booth.

"Too fair," she said, looking across at her husband, "but your wife is very handsome," she added, glancing

at the Zenobia-like woman who, at over forty years of age, had not a wrinkle on her face, and was, perhaps, the finest monument possible to Mr. Holt's uninterrupted success in life.

Serenely unconscious of rivalry, but fully aware of her advantages, which included her house, her diamonds, her gayeties, her children, and, last of all, her husband, Mrs. Holt looked exactly what she was—a handsome, well-meaning, good sort of second-rate woman, likely to do her duty fairly well, and enjoy herself thoroughly to the end of the chapter.

Hugo Holt cast a brief glance at his wife.

"You should have said, 'has been,' he remarked, "and when you speak of a woman in the past tense, not the present, all is over."

Something cynical, hard, struck on Berry's ear unpleasantly. "You would be better as a lover than husband," she thought, "and you loved her enough to marry her—and she is the mother of your children; if she is stupid, I believe that she is good." But aloud she said, "I think I should be very proud of those beautiful diamonds if my husband had earned them."

"He will be a great man yet," said Hugo, with a curious blending of admiration, envy, and some faint contempt in the eyes he turned on Mr. Booth; "but do you never wear a necklace?" and he glanced at her throat.

"Don't you know," she said, laughing, "that necklaces have gone out, and necks have come in?"

He smiled, and she was startled to see how his face changed.

"In some curious way he suggests one of those apostolic figures in a stained-glass window that one gazes at with a certain awe," she had said to her husband when she returned home, and Mr. Booth had burst out laughing, and said he knew no one less of an apostle or monk than Hugo Holt.

And now that he smiled, the wizard-like spell that he had seemed to wield over her vanished, and she felt no fear, only happiness, as she sat beside him.

And suddenly it was borne in upon her what a pity it was that she had spoken to Hetty about him—to speak such words as might burn and blister any woman's tongue, they were so much more wicked than if even thought, and how depraved her mind must gradually have become since such thoughts could have entered in!

All this flashed through her mind as she turned to her other neighbor, who had addressed some remark to her on the one burning question of the hour—politics. Hugo Holt could survey her at his leisure, and he did so with the keen, critical taste of a man daily familiar with every kind of beauty.

I think that a woman's loveliness should be like a cloud, or a sunset, or a summer sea, constantly changing and full of surprises, so that you are perpetually delighted, yet never wholly grasp your delight, but each moment expect something more exquisite still—and thus you are always kept a little hungry—the state of mind in which a true Sybarite enjoys himself the most perfectly.

And Berry was a surprise to Hugo Holt. Hitherto he had seen her only in morning dress, save on the brief occasion when she had raced him for the slipper at Ladisloes, but to-night he knew that whether she were beautiful or no in other men's eyes, she filled his own not only to the exclusion of every other woman present, but to that of any absent one in the world.

"When are you coming to see me again?" he said quietly when she turned back to him.

"My husband and I are not in trouble now," she said; "when we are, I will go to you. And you are always so busy—I feel that it is an insult to plague you with a mere trifling lawsuit like ours. I wonder if you managed to see half the people who were sitting outside on

chairs, dodging round corners, bullying your clerks, and all ready to eat me up with rage when I got admitted before them?"

He smiled a little, but said nothing.

"I don't know why you let me go in so soon," she said, shaking her bronze head, "you had never seen me before, and—"

"You forget that your name is well known," he said.

"But that is nothing," she said, "so many celebrated people were there; and handsome as the people are here to-night, those at your chambers were handsomer still."

It was true. Hardly a woman of note or beauty in London had not at some time or other gone to him on private and delicate business; and as they all came to him in tears, in indignation, or in entreaty (but nearly always in beauty), he had the most opportunities of perhaps any man in London for the study of a woman. Did a lovely soul in despair swoon on his shoulder in one room, there were half a dozen others waiting in adjacent apartments ready to treat him to a never-ending crescendo of emotions, all of which he observed with the delicate, acute intelligence that distinguished him, and seemed unmoved by; though if the man of brains stood firm, perchance the man of flesh and blood sometimes trembled.

"I am honored by the confidence of a great many ladies," he said.

Berry felt a piece of impertinence rising to her lips; she knew it was coming, and had no power to smother it.

"Is it—is it," she said with the most innocent air, "because you know how to flirt so well, that you have succeeded so brilliantly?"

"You are severe," he said, with a slight indrawing of the lips, "but at least I was not successful in one thing—obtaining your slipper."

"I will leave it you in my will," she said as she leaned back in her chair, and put both hands behind her back.

Whatever charm Mrs. Booth might have, it was crowned with the supreme quality of distinction; the quality of resistance, too, was strong in her nature, or Hugo Holt had never studied that branch of a woman's character yet.

"No," he said, "you shall give it me of your own free will—and soon."

"That will be never," she said, as quietly as he.

"You may change," he said.

"And you may improve."

"Yes. But I should like to improve *your* knowledge in some respects."

"You are welcome to try. Do you usually succeed?"

He did not answer her.

"You have no time. What can a man do who has no time?"

"He can make some."

Now was her turn for silence, and she used it in forcing herself to look at the decorations of the table, and to wonder absently if the gold plate were to please his wife's taste, and the white flowers his own.

Many well-known faces bordered those flowers—probably no one unpossessed of some special intellectual gift, or unadorned by some brilliant laurel-leaf of success, was present, and, instead of feeling proud to be in such company, Beryl suddenly asked herself why she was there. Because he coveted a sight of her, or because she was famous? She had come eagerly to-night, for she wanted an insight into his home life, into his character, of which she knew nothing but by hearsay. She knew only that he had violently attracted her, and she was difficult of attraction.

"I shall call to-morrow afternoon," he said, "between four and five."

"You will not be able to leave Lely Place," she said, paling in spite of herself, "and—I shall not be at home."

"I can wait."

"And half London will be at the door waiting for—you."

"They can wait, too," he said, as he skinned a peach for her dessert. "So you have been married eight years, and yet you do not flirt?"

"Nine. I never felt the slightest inclination."

"And when you do?"

"I will tell you."

"I shall hold you to your promise," he said, in his quiet voice, that was one of the secrets of his power. He was so still always, and his fame spoke for him so loud! His very impassibility, as opposed to his swiftness of eye and speech, arrested you. In the somewhat worn face there was always something intense, and the presence of the sword in the scabbard was never for an instant forgotten.

Their eyes met, and into the gray and the brown the same indomitable spirit seemed to leap and flash defiance at its own reflection, and the woman drew in her breath sharply, and the man's mouth set itself into a hard line.

"So it is to be a duel *à mort*," he thought, as she dragged her eyes away from his; but he saw that she had grown white as the bosom that was fluttering beneath her lace like a terrified bird, and he knew that for all her carelessness his influence over her was established. His experience of women was infinite, and this woman, if of a rare order than most, was not much less difficult to understand than the rest.

He had seen at once that she was not one of those women who carry on an intrigue as lightly as she wears a rose in her waist-belt, and changes the one as often as the other; that, with her, a lover would not come in as a mere part of the appanage of her existence, to call on her upon a certain day, to be met at a certain place, then dismissed from her mind until she saw him next—forgotten in the whirl of her worldly existence. This woman was differ-

ent—she was capable of a grand passion, and for one man only.

He would see her to-morrow—alone, and a *tête-à-tête* he had meant to arrange upstairs presently need not be carried out.

Then he devoted himself to a few moments' conversation with his neglected right-hand neighbor, but found himself listening intently for Berry's voice.

"Are you doing anything now?" he heard the man next to her say.

"I am eating a peach."

"Ah! but I meant, are you painting anything now?"

"I never paint."

Hugo Holt laughed, and Berry looked round quickly.

"Oh!" she said to him, "I meant to thank you. You are the first person who has taken me in to dinner for nearly ten years who has not said to me, 'What are you *doing* now?'"

"But you do, you know," said his imperturbable neighbor. "By the way, of course, you've seen 'Shocking!' Whenever I meditate prussic acid, I look at 'Shocking!' and recover."

"But is not Mr. B—— quite as shocking, too, and more amusing?" broke in Lady Zoë, who was sitting next but one to Berry.

"He does not amuse the policemen who are his body-guard. One of them said the other day that he didn't mind waiting for him half the night outside all sorts of places, but what he *did* object to was attending him to early communion next morning."

"I mean to ask him to come and see me," said Lady Zoë, "and then I shall kill him, and earn a place in Paradise."

"Oh, no! you will only fall in love with him," said the man's soft slow voice, "and of course he will fall in love with you. And then he will give you a Bible; he

keeps a stock as inexhaustible as his *amours*, and everything will be quite *en règle*."

Lady Zoë shook her head.

"He is growing respectable," she said, "and actually taking care of appearances. Last night I sat opposite him at dinner. He was between two lovely women, and so transported by their charms that he eat nothing, but gloated upon them alternately. Then suddenly he would recollect himself, his back shot up, his jaw dropped, his features assumed an appearance of rigid virtue, and he looked straight before him with the eyes of a fish."

"Lord Palmerston should not have been so hard upon him when he said, 'That young man will die in a madhouse or ruin his country,'" said another woman's voice, that had a soft, chiding ring in it; "their weaknesses were so very similar that each might say, '*Nous sommes liés par nos coquins!*'"

But this smart remark was lost on Berry, who had turned to discover a charming little figure that had stolen in between her host and herself, and who sat with one slender hand clasped over her father's, while she looked up at him with the most utter satisfaction and love.

Berry thought she had got the glimpses into his home life and character that she desired, as she stooped down, and kissed the child's soft brown cheek.

CHAPTER VI.

"Detain me not! a dim power drives me hence,
And that will be my guide."

Mrs. Booth was standing before a looking-glass let into a recess in the wall that reflected not only herself, but the bank of flowers at its foot.

Her hands were behind her back, and her eyes were traveling upward and round a frame of ebony, shaped something like a church door, and with brackets upon

which some beautiful specimens of china rested. A wreath of flowers painted on gold made the inner setting of the glass, that in turn gave back a fire-place veiled in bronze-green plush, with Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter dancing above in Dresden, and a few pictures and a pair of priceless *cloisonné* jars above. Berry sighed impatiently, then went to one of the windows and looked out.

It was only three o'clock, but the February afternoon was drawing sharply to a close. In Brook Street the place was strangely quiet, and Berry sighed again as she looked out. Then she dropped the curtain, moved slowly, passed beneath the plush hangings into the second room, and sat down for a moment at the piano, where the mirror behind it again gave back her face and the china on the wall behind her.

It struck her suddenly that she had too much china, and *far* too many mirrors. She remembered that in the house of the most beautiful woman of her age you will find no mirror, save the silver-framed one in her bedroom; though glasses enough she finds, I wot, in the eyes of her worshipers!

Berry started up, and disappeared into the last, the longest room of the three, that ended unexpectedly, and round a corner, in a fourth, just large enough to contain a settee, a window, a book-shelf, some pictures—and no door.

The settee had been variously occupied by celebrated couples in its turn, and was invariably called "Mrs. Booth's spooning corner," though in point of fact she had never occupied it either singly, or in company in her life.

But now she took her seat there, looking at "Lorna Doone," who, with a lamp suspended over her head, and all her pure beauty visible in profile, showed like snow from the background of velvet against which she was placed.

But a restless demon seemed to possess Berry that afternoon, and she was just starting up again when faint footsteps in the distance swiftly approached her, and she turned almost as white as the gentle Lorna herself.

"It is only three o'clock," she said, in an odd whisper, then she went forward, and was face to face with Llewellyn Poore.

"How do you do?" she cried. "Oh, how glad I am to see you!" and the young man colored a little with pleasure and surprise at her reception of his first visit.

"Come and get warm," she said, leading the way to the other rooms where wood fires blazed cheerfully; but he asked to be allowed to linger and look at some of the beautiful things with which Mrs. Booth had enriched her home; and she showed them all to him with the pride of a shop-woman who not only sells, but makes her wares.

"But I didn't make the carpets or the curtains," she said, looking down at the faint neutral tints at his feet, then up at the gold and silver threads worked into the precious stuff that veiled her windows; "though I hung up the pictures, and I covered the frames for my china, and I sewed the satin on the chairs and the velvet on the little tables—and I do the flowers myself, every morning."

"And they are better than all," said Llewellyn Poore—"better even than your taste!" He had not meant to say it, but some instinct told him that above all the artificial beauty, the luxury of her surroundings, the natural loveliness of life was paramount in her mind.

"Yes," she said, "I think that is my only dread of poverty—that I could not afford to buy flowers. And how are they all at Ladisloes?" she said, as she stirred the fire into a blaze.

"I have not seen Mrs. Cholmondely since you and I left Ladisloes. You know it is not much more than a week ago."

"Only a week!" said Berry. "It seems years since we played hunt-the-slipper, and dug in the garden, and meditated shots with lemons at Coleridge's plaster nose in the hall. What fun we had! But tell me," she added, quickly, "do you mind taking me out for a walk this afternoon?"

Her request solved a riddle that had been forming in his mind. If he knew Mrs. Booth's inward life very little, he knew her outwardly as a woman who dressed perfectly. And her tailor-made gray dress, with its linen collar and cuffs, had seemed to him out of harmony with the bronze-gold tints of her rooms, the voluptuous perfection of color, warmth, and scent that enfolded them.

"I will take you anywhere," he said, "but do you know that it is intensely cold, and that a fog is drawing in?"

"And I am turning you out," she said; "but if you had not come I should have gone by myself. Here are my cloak, and my hat, and my gloves"—and she put on the last first, and her hat rather more carefully, then held out her cloak to Llewellyn Poore, who helped her on with it; and as she drew the red plush together, he thought it seemed to close in the sweetness of her face, and a paleness, too, that was unusual there. Perhaps she felt herself to be a Cinderella in her haste, for outside the drawing-room door she paused and followed Llewellyn Poore's glance as it traveled up the engravings that lined the staircase.

"Do you care for them?" she said. "There are some better the next landing, but only my boudoir and workroom are there. My husband's workshop is down-stairs," and they went together into a square room on the ground floor, paneled to the ceiling with books in half a dozen languages. "And they are all learned," she said, with pride in the wave of her little hand, "and he is writing a better book than any one of them."

She stooped over a table littered all over with papers and notes, in the midst of which were some foolscap sheets, freshly written, and upon which the ink was scarcely dry, and involuntarily Llewellyn Poore thought of Carlyle and his wife—when Jean was young and Carlyle only at early middle-age.

"Of course he has not time to come out with me," she said, a little proudly, as if she read his thoughts, "but is not that four o'clock striking?" And she ran out of the room as if for her life.

"No; it is half past three," he said, as her restless hand drew the hall door to behind them, and the last stroke sounded from St. George's hard by.

"Where shall we go?" she said, gayly, as they stood in the street together. "To the Park?"

"I am afraid that rather a bad fog is drawing in," said the young man, who was indeed regretting the warmth and fragrance of the house they had just quitted.

"Are you afraid that we shall be lost in it?" she said. "Well, I almost wish we might be, for I don't want to go home until seven o'clock to-night!"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Do you often walk out as late as that?" he said.

"No. And, will you believe it, you are the only young man I have ever walked out with since I married?"

"Then I am even happier than I supposed," he said, in the earnest way that, together with something uncommon in his face, made him rather out of the way and remarkable.

Berry looked at him eagerly, wistfully. Had any one told her, two hours ago, that she would be placing this resolute-eyed young man as a bulwark between her heart and danger, she would have laughed; but now an odd sense of safety came to her, and her spirits rose.

"There goes England's enemy!" she exclaimed, as they crossed Berkeley Square.

. . . .

"Where?" said Llewellyn Poore, looking round.

"There!" she pointed toward a gay old man with a flower in his button-hole, who was skipping along beside a blooming young girl, who ought to have been, if she wasn't, his great-granddaughter.

Millions of money, oceans of England's bravest and noblest blood had been squandered by that withered hand. England's very honor had been cast down into the bottomless abyss of his reckless mistakes. Yet, he but squandered and flung away all the more royally, for none of the riches were drawn from himself, but the nation.

"Doesn't it make you choke to think of all our brave fellows marching out to the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne,' sent to certain death by the man whom Carlyle describes as 'one of the most contemptible men he ever looked on'?" cried Berry, as the great man and his charmer disappeared round a corner.

"Don't ask me to abuse him," said Mr. Poore; "I know some of his family, and they are charming."

"Then get them to persuade him to resign," cried Berry, indignantly, "while still we have a rag of honor with which to cover us as Englishmen. He ought to be made to resign. What right has a dotard of seventy in office? Of course he can talk; but his long practice makes words come to him as easy as writing or painting, when one has the knack. And this old man has lost self-control in every way. Which foreign paper was it that described our House of Commons as a disorderly establishment, ruled over by an old gentleman of uncontrollable temper?"

"I had no idea that you were a politician," said Mr. Poore, when she paused, out of breath.

"Oh! I have lots more to say—but it would be wasted upon you. So you are a Radical! Well, I have known gentlemen who were Radicals, but never a Radical who was a gentleman."

"You frighten me," said the young man, laughing. "Why did you not give me some hint of your views at Ladisloes? then I should never have found courage to call upon you to-day."

"But I am very glad that you did. Do you think our men will be in time to save Gordon? I seem to see him always with those eagle eyes so full of light, looking out night and day for succor—and the man who might have sent it, dancing, pirouetting, amusing himself at home, but slowly and surely dethroning himself in the hearts of a people who are slow to give up what they have once sworn by and established. And when our men get to Khartoum, instead of the shouts of victory, there will be silence—the silence of the grave."

"You take things too seriously," said Mr. Poore, struck by something unusual, intense in her face; "I think your nerves are unstrung; perhaps you have been working too hard lately."

"Working?" she said. "Oh! I never work. I dash down scraps, thoughts, ideas, but I do not work. But there has been a strain on my mind during the last few months. Did you not know that Mr. Booth has a lawsuit coming on, and if he loses it, we are almost beggars?"

"I did not know it," said the young man, shocked, and throwing a backward thought to the perfect little house they had just left; "but you have a good chance of winning it?"

"I think not. When I went to ask Mr. Holt, as an expert, his opinion, he did not take a favorable view of the case."

"And why did not your husband go?" said Llewellyn, rather brusquely.

"He was busy with his book. Whatever business has to be attended to, his solicitor and I do it between us. But women were not meant for business," she added, shaking her head; "they always make a muddle of it."

"Have you seen Mr. Holt since you came back?" said the young man, rather averting his eyes from, than looking at, her.

"We dined at his house last night. Are you one of his enemies?" she said, looking at him steadily.

"Not if you are his friend," he said, with more in his voice than he had intended to convey.

"I know him so slightly," she said, "at most I have met him half a dozen times."

They had reached the park now, and were pacing beneath the leafless boughs, too preoccupied to notice the spectral mists that were gradually closing round them into one dense, opaque mass. An odd feeling of exultation gradually took possession of Berry, and some of the wild spirits she had shown at Ladisloes once more moved her. You could not have found a more outwardly happy pair than the two who went swinging along with so quick a step, and with such fresh roses in their cheeks that many persons turned to looked with admiration after them as they passed. But outside Knightsbridge Barracks they found themselves suddenly inclosed in the fog's embrace, and they could hardly see the faces they turned upon each other.

"We must go back," said Berry, "but we need not hurry. If we walk close beside the railings, it is impossible for us to lose our way. It will take us a good long time to get home?" she added, with a curious anxiety in her voice.

"Perhaps longer than you will like," he said, more puzzled by her than ever.

So, in single file, they went along the way they had come, each with a hand on the railings, the muffled roll of invisible wheels close at their side, and their conversation flagging a little with the necessity of raising their voices to each other. At Hyde Park Corner they were piloted across by a friendly policeman, and then Llewellyn

Poore breathed freely, and Berry sighed, as they moved forward, her hand still in his. At that moment the fog lifted, and showed, a pace or two away, Hugo Holt.

She thought there was something stern, menacing even, in his pale face, as he pulled off his hat low to her, his eyes fixed all the while on Llewellyn Poore.

Her step had not slackened as she approached him; neither did his as he passed her. A moment, and the fog had again swallowed up all, but not before Llewellyn had seen the brilliant color that had flushed into Mrs. Booth's face.

"Let us make haste," she cried, as anxious now to reach her home as just now she had been to quit it. "Surely a horse's legs would carry us as safely as our own?"

"No," he said, "they would not be so safe. And I should like to see you inside your own door before I leave you."

"It is all the same," she said, listlessly; and so, with all her bright spirits gone, they made their slow pilgrimage to Brook Street, and St. George's was striking six when Llewellyn Poore groped his way to the bell and pulled it.

Apparently the house was on the lookout for its errant mistress, for the door instantly flew open, and from the distance Mr. Booth approached, rubbing his hands in anxiety, but dismissing her from his mind the moment he had found her. He shook hands with Llewellyn Poore, then retreated to his study—happy.

"Won't you come up and have some tea?" she said, but the young man excused himself.

"It was then that the man-servant said, "Mr. Hugo Holt called, ma'am, about half an hour ago. He said that you expected him, but I told him that you were out walking with Mr. Llewellyn Poore."

"Did he ask if I had waited in for him?" said Berry.

"Yes, ma'am, but I told him you had gone out at half past three."

"Come and see me again, soon," she said, turning to Llewellyn Poore, "and tell me all about your new briefs —and some more droll stories about the judges! And come *soon*," she added, with a warmth that astonished the discreet butler almost as much as his young mistress's other vagaries that afternoon.

"I will," said the young man, with equal warmth, and went away, trying to unriddle the woman he had just left.

That night, as Mrs. Booth stood unlacing her white velvet gown in the dim green light of her boudoir, she laughed in the looking-glass at her own reflection, which she found delightful, and as her dress slipped in heavy folds to her knees she thought of Millais' picture, St. Agnes Eve. "But I am not afraid of him," she said aloud and triumphantly; "though I *did* run away from him, I am not in the least afraid!"

As she lifted her arms above her head, it occurred to her how much more lovely are a woman's shoulder and upper arm than the elbow and wrist that her ordinary dress displays. For awhile she stood looking with all the keen delight of an artist at the satin *reflets*, the divine softness of her skin, and half-unconsciously she moved from one attitude to another, until she felt a slight stir in the room, and looking in the glass she saw the face of her husband just behind her.

"What are you doing?" he said, puzzled by her unusual fit of vanity.

"Nothing!" she said, as without turning, she drew his head down to hers; but to her heart she said, "I am playing the wanton!"

CHAPTER VII.

Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse.

It was Primrose Day, and every street, every nook and corner of a vast city bore witness to how sweet was the smell in men's nostrils of a great man's memory.

Great ladies had piled them in huge banks upon their balconies, every window furnished its contingent, and every *mondaine*, milliner, masher, workman, and child that you met, wore a cluster of the pale flower that the greatest politician of our time had chosen for his emblem.

Little did he think, when he chose it, what a weapon this frail flower would be with which to strike in the face his enemies! Silent, but *how* the primrose speaks! How the Whigs must feel it as they walk abroad, and see it everywhere save on their own breasts! It speaks the protest of the nation against the policy that would have ruined any other country but England, while it recalls with veneration the deeds of one who was always for his country, never for himself, and who finely said, "The first duty of a public man is to despise popularity." Well, he had a fair measure of it in life, his share of it is regal now, and increases with every year—a nobler testimony to the work he has left behind him, than had he been in life-time the idol of the people. Brook Street was not behindhand in its tribute, but perhaps the smartest balconies in it were Mrs. Booth's; and she looked pretty smart herself as she stood in her door way, colloguing with a flower-man who wished to sell her a cart-load of flowers for exactly six times as much as they had cost him.

"I will have three white azaleas, and one red one," Berry was saying in a very determined tone, "two pots of lilies, and four hyacinths, and I will give you in exchange"

(she dropped her voice as much as was consistent with dignity) "one old coat, two waistcoats, a pair of boots, and an old hat—a boxer."

"Couldn't do it, mum—couldn't do it noways. The pots you want's worth a pound, and frock-coats, mum, isn't worn by gentlemen in my walk of life, and there's a difficulty in disposing of 'em."

"You can go down in the kitchen and look at them," said Berry, majestically; "or else you can take all these things"—and she pointed to the highly ornamented door-step—"away."

The man retreated to the area-steps, Berry retired to the dining-room, where the butler soon appeared.

"He says he can't give you any more than ten shillings, ma'am," he announced.

"Oh, Gregory!" cried Berry, "it is far too little. There were *no* holes in any of them except the boots!"

Gregory smiled. Perhaps he sympathized with his mistress's passion for flowers, as much as with Mr. Booth's disinclination to pay for them; and as his master's old clothes were not only three sizes too big for him, but also in appearance far below his own point of gentility, he always aided and abetted her thievings to the best of his power.

"I don't think they're worth much more, ma'am," he said; "master messes up his things so with chemicals. But perhaps we can find a few more old things to put together—"

"Not out of Mr. Booth's wardrobe, Gregory," said Berry in despair; "he made such a fuss about that last pair of trousers. And have you looked in the pockets of the things down-stairs, to make sure there are no pickles or bits of bodies in them?"

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"There's that skull, Gregory," she said, after both

had meditated for a few seconds, "done up in a blue bag in the back room. Mr. Booth says it is worth a pound—but that would not be nice—each flower would seem to me like a Basil-tree," she added to herself.

"Master would find it out, ma'am. But I will see what I can do." And he disappeared down-stairs.

When Hetty Cholmondely drove up five minutes later, it was to see a donkey-cart standing before the door, upon which were piled old coats, breeches, boots, a veteran white waistcoat, a lady's skirt and sundries, the apex of the whole being in process of crowning by a particularly disreputable old hat.

"Oh! you dear girl!" cried Berry, as, the elegant barrow moving on, Hetty in her cab became visible, and in another moment or two they were rushing into each other's arms.

"I see you are at your old tricks again," said Hetty, nodding after the trophied cart, "but the house looks lovely from outside—and look at me!" and she held her chin back to display the enormous bunch of primroses at her throat.

"You look lovely, too!" said Berry, leading her friend upstairs; "but don't say a word before Ned about the flowers; it's the only thing we ever quarrel about—that and tidying up."

"Have you no other cause for quarrel?" said Hetty, sinking into the deepest and warmest easy-chair like the luxury-loving little creature that she was, and looking at Berry, who looked even more *chic* than usual in her severely plain white serge gown.

"None!" said Berry; "you know—you know"—she turned a waggish eye upon her friend—"I never flirted!"

"Which means," said Hetty, "that your fancy for Hugo Holt has died out."

"Which means," said Berry with vigor, "that I feel

more than ever, that I do not care about the meanness, the vulgarity, the self-degradation of an unlawful flirtation."

"*Has* there been one?" said Hetty dryly.

"No; but do you think a man can read in a woman's face all that she has thought and said about him? I believe that Hugo Holt reads me like a book—there is the degradation."

"But where are the meanness, the vulgarity?"

"Listen. Last night I went to the A——'s. Ned was busy, and couldn't or wouldn't come, and *he* was there with Zenobia. He hardly spoke to me; this is what is so mean, so vulgar—that a man will try and make love to you behind his wife's back, and before her face practically ignore you."

"He doesn't look like a man to be afraid of anything," said Hetty. "But what did you do?"

"Yawned—fanned myself—prayed for some one to flirt with—and Providence sent somebody. I took care that the man did not leave me for a second during the quarter of an hour I remained in the house. As I was going downstairs I passed Mr. Holt. He said something—I forget what. I said, 'Yes, I am going now,' and passed on. Mr. Trent waited while my cloak was put on, and when I came out I met Mr. Holt. 'Are you really going so soon?' he said; his voice was angry, though his face was as quiet as ever. 'Yes,' I said, 'I am not used to going out alone, and I am wretched without my husband.' 'You might do without him for a little while,' he said, and then I took Mr. Trent's arm and went out to the carriage. I believe he thought I was going to take Mr. Trent with me—that is the worst of a man having a single bad thought of you; he always suspects you of being worse with somebody else than you are with him."

There was intense bitterness in Berry's voice, and she stamped her foot with anger as she ceased speaking; she

had been so high above all these things, and she felt herself sunk so low.

"What had you got on?" said Hetty, asking the question that every woman has asked another at some period or other of her life.

"Nothing!" said Berry, absently; "I mean, nothing particular; but I suppose it was all right, for the women stared at me more than usual."

"I know how you can look," said Hetty nodding. "And how often have you seen him since you came back?"

"Once at his house, and once last night."

"Only that! My dear, you are a fortunate woman. His fancy has died out as quickly as yours. If he were in love with you, he would not have rested till he had managed to see you again."

"He has not time to remember me. Besides, he did try—once. He called here and I was—out."

"Did you know he was coming?"

"Yes!"

"H'm! Did he call again?"

"No, and never will. That is always a woman's fate; if she is good she is forgotten. If one could only lose a lover and gain a friend, how happy one might be!"

"An ugly woman might—a beautiful one never," said Hetty; "her every charm fights against the barrier of friendship, and there are few men strong and cold enough to sit by her side, and shut their eyes."

"But he is very strong, and very cold too," objected Berry, "and I am sure he could do it if he tried. And I *want* to see him sometimes—to be with him."

There was a passionate longing in her voice that smote painfully on Hetty's ear; she half raised herself in her chair and said:

"But if so, why did not you stay a little while in his company last night?"

"Why? Oh! Hetty, do you think that when I saw him I felt like that? I only felt ashamed and proud, and that it would be easy to treat him worse than any other man of my acquaintance."

"That is safer," said Hetty, "than if you were in love with him when you saw him, and out of love when you are alone. Take my advice; see him as often as you possibly can; get thoroughly disenchanted with him—naturally, he will do the same with you, and you will live to laugh as heartily at yourself as at any other love-struck dame of your acquaintance."

"He would never *let* a woman be disenchanted of him," said Berry.

"Oh! my dear," cried Hetty, "to think that you should bring all this freshness of feeling to what is as old as the hills! Every man covets his neighbor's wife, but let him get her for a week, and he will be thankful to have back his own! And another woman's husband would be just as aggravating as the one you have now, if fate should ever turn him into your spouse."

Berry nodded. She knew it all long ago—the perpetual tergiversation of love; for she had not lived her life and lived in her world for nothing.

"I was hearing some odd talk yesterday at the W——'s," she said; "they were arguing that nothing is wrong if it is done artistically; that, having only one life, you must enjoy and get the very most and the very best out of it; you must contribute something to the sum of exquisite happiness in the world, and *that* you can do by contributing all that is best in yourself."

"What absurd jargon!" cried Hetty, indignantly; "I should like to set each one of them down to three hours' hard reading at his Bible—and do you listen to them, Berry?"

"By their fruits shall ye know them," she said; "I mean, *me*—and if I don't profess much, Hetty, why, then

I shall forswear myself all the less. And how is Loony?" she added, with a complete change of of manner.

"Oh! quite well. He is coming to fetch me by and by. And how's Moony?"

"Rather more scientific than usual—but I want you to look at him carefully. I have an idea that he is ill."

"Don't look so pale, dear!" cried Hetty, jumping up and kissing her; "you know he never did look overstrong, and those fair men always look so much worse than they really are. And have you seen Spoony? I have got some news for him! That little jade Christabel is going to be married to an impossibly charming man out in China, and to whom she has been engaged these two years."

Berry laughed.

"It was very smart of her to be so quiet over it, and get all the fun she could out of her life," she said; "but, dear me, when I used to be engaged, I used to tell everybody! It was rather awkward, because I got engaged so often. They all had such pretty names, and yet I ended up with a Booth!"

"Were you in love with him?" said Hetty, curiously.

"Of course, I was engaged to somebody else when I saw him first. Oh! there's the luncheon-bell! Aren't you hungry? I am."

"I didn't know people in love were ever hungry."

"Then I am not in love."

"How lovely your rooms are, Berry! I never see a house I like so well as yours."

"It is not to be named in the same day as Ladisloes."

"But that is country, and this is town," said Hetty, as they went down-stairs together.

"I expect that before long we shall occupy a much larger and more airy one," said Berry, in a whisper.

"You extravagant soul! You are going to *move?*"

"Very likely. To the work-house."

They both burst out laughing, and their voices brought

Mr. Booth out of his sanctum. At luncheon Hetty studied him more than once, and thought that he looked ill. Could he be jealous? She brought in Mr. Holt's name unexpectedly, but without producing any unusual signs of interest in him, and his manner to Berry was as absently tender as usual.

And when the two young women flitted gayly off an hour later to pay calls, they did not know that it was the very last time they would cross that threshold together, nor dreamed of when, and under what circumstances, would be their next meeting.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Alas!" said she, "we ne'er can be
Made happy by compulsion!"

It was six o'clock in the morning on the first of April, and Mrs. Booth was engaged in the elegant occupation of making an April Fool of her husband.

She had done so for eight years with uninterrupted success, to her own satisfaction, and the secret pleasure of Edgar Booth, who delighted in his wife's frolicsome spirit more than she was at all aware of.

Preoccupied as he was, he loved her, and her only in the whole world. To him she was always

"A little child, a limber elf,
Singing, dancing to itself;
A fairy thing, with red, round cheeks,
That always finds and never seeks;"

and even when she "tidied up" his table—the most unforgivable sin in his decalogue—he forgave her.

No doubt his scientific pursuits took a more somber pleasure, as contrasted with the bright spirit that frolicked around them, and often he would sit with his door open,

that he might hear her snatches of song above-stairs, or her light footstep as she rushed down to the kitchen on some flying impulse to the cook, while occasionally a curly head would slide round the angle of the door, and a kiss be dropped on his slightly bald forehead; then he would be alone again, but happy in the sense that she was near.

If he ever thought of the child whose image she bore about with her as jealously as an Indian woman will carry for years the body of her dead child, it was only to dismiss him from his mind. She was so light-hearted, so happy—he wanted nothing but herself, and she was content with him.

Was she? Did he know how tiny feet forever pattered beside her—

"Upstairs, down-stairs, in my lady's chamber"—

how with every year she seemed to see the growth of the child that she had lost so soon after her own life had been almost sacrificed to his?

"Wake up! wake up!" she was crying on this particular first of April, while she accentuated her cries with a good sound shaking.

"What is it?" cried Mr. Booth, starting up and looking just as startled and woe-begone a man as he who drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night.

"What is it?" cried Berry, "why, *look* at yourself!" and she fixed her eyes in horror on the top of his head.

Out shot Mr. Booth to the looking-glass.

"Where?" he cried, ducking his head to the altitude of Berry's mirror.

"Why, further back, you old donkey! Take my hand-glass if you can't see it!"

Mr. Booth took the hand-glass, and after exhaustively examining his crown, turned round to take a back view of it, working up gradually to his forehead.

"April Fool!" cried Berry, in ecstasies of joy, as Mr.

Booth, with certainly every air of looking his part, retreated to his couch.

But there was not the usual look of rather shamefaced enjoyment on his face that she was used to beholding there on such occasions, and the pillow that she had armed herself with in case of reprisals, slipped from her slackened hold as she sat down at a little distance, and looked at him.

"Was it not a good joke?" she said, adding, rather anxiously, "Are you worried, Ned? Did you get any news about the lawsuit last night?"

"If you will bring me my clothes," he said, "I will tell you."

Berry ran to the dressing-room and fetched them. They were heavy, for it was Mr. Booth's habit to carry all his correspondence in his trousers' pockets, all his light literature and love letters (if any) in his breast ones, and a small library of solid books in his coat-tails. Nor house-maid nor man-servant was suffered to lay a finger on those sacred vestments; the only brushing they ever got was from Berry's hand, when they were on his back; and when the excess of luggage they contained wore out the cloth and silk, compelling him to change them, he effected the removal of his treasures from pocket to pocket with the greatest reluctance and disgust.

Now, with the practiced skill of the sloven, he fished out of an immense mass of letters one that he handed to Berry, giving her a kiss at the same time, like a mother who offers sweets and powder with the same hand.

"You must go and see Hugo Holt about it," he said, "and ask him if he will undertake the case. Sawter is muddling it, but the people haven't got a leg to stand on; so how they can have any chance I don't know. And now, my dear, I'm going to have forty winks." And rolling himself in the sheets, he swathed himself round like an Egyptian mummy, and composed himself for slumber.

Berry thought that he looked as if he were in his shroud, with only the long, sharp outline of one arm visible. Involuntarily there recurred to her that grewsome tale where a dead man is "watched" by one lonely watcher. Suddenly the dead man's arm slips out from beneath its cere-cloth; it creeps on, and on, and on to a dozen times its length, till it grips the watcher and holds her, and it is a mad-woman who is found in her chair next morning, while the dead man lies peacefully as before.

For some time Berry sat with her eyes fixed on that shrouded figure, forcing herself to think of everything but Hugo Holt, and with the unopened letter still in her hand; then, when she saw that he was asleep, she came to his side and stood looking down upon him.

"How ill he looks!" she said to herself as she marked the blue hollows of the temples, the black shadows beneath the eyes, and the waxen pallor of her husband's face. He had always been pale; the late hours that he kept at night, the sedentary habits that kept him at his table the greater part of the day, did not encourage bright color, but this morning some almost intangible change in him struck her, and made a terror in the heart that she felt to be guilty toward him.

"Oh! Ned! Ned!" she whispered below her breath, "are you going away? do you want to leave me?" But only a fainter breathing, a paler shade upon his haggard face, seemed to answer her as she gazed, and all the slow-growing anger of years against him was forgotten. She remembered that on one occasion, at least, he had shown as much determination of character as Hugo Holt could have done, and that was when he had fallen in love with her.

There is a story told of Nelson that when some sailors were discussing his chances of Heaven, one of the men exclaimed:

"Bless you, he wouldn't wait to be asked, he'd walk

slap in!" and it was with something of this vigor of attack that Mr. Booth had carried by assault Berry's heart. He so fell in love with her, astounded her, and pursued her, giving up all his most cherished pursuits to make sure of her, that she was fairly swept off her feet, and married him, convinced that she had got the most ardent and devoted lover in the world.

That he was fifteen years older than herself she knew, also that he was only moderately rich; but when she found that all his pursuits were solitary, and that in him she could never find the companionship that is the most priceless gift a man can give a woman, her heart went a little cold, and the first little rift within the lute made itself visible. A true woman would rather live in a garret with a man who shares her thoughts and life, than in a palace with one who lives his life out beside her, but with which hers is never suffered to mingle. Husbands, give your wives, when you are able, your company and your time; try and enter into their thoughts, their troubles, and a sweeter bond of mutual dependence and sympathy will be established between you, and one that will give you more joy, than the hottest blaze of passion you have ever known. Have you ever noticed the many couples one sees abroad after business hours in the streets and parks—so quiet, so gray, so contented? I like to see them, for they have grown old and gray and contented together. But when you see a youngish blooming face (whether of man or woman) beside a jaded one, be sure that the one has not shared life with the other, that he has kept the pleasure and given her the toil, and that there had never been true sympathy of heart between them.

For the rest, I don't think Mr. Booth made himself more actively odious than most husbands—in some respects he was their superior. He did not beat his wife, after the manner of the lower orders, when she was saucy, or flirt with the maids as if he belonged to the upper

classes; and if he grumbled sometimes at bills, he disbursed cheerfully anything he had in his pocket, then returned serenely to his meditations. If you did not mind waiting five minutes for an answer, you might possibly get one, always intelligent, and all the riper, no doubt, for being kept so long in his mind. Sometimes, indeed, his replies showed unexpected originality, as when, for instance, he was asked one day how many children a Mr. Z. had to which he answered, "Two, and he's expecting a boy." Then, detecting some astonishment on the face of his querist, he added, "Ah! I mean he wants a boy."

On another occasion he scandalized a devout relative by alluding to Ash Wednesday as a general holiday. In clothing, I don't think he showed more disregard to the bagginess of his trousers, and the shapelessness of his coats than is becoming in a truly scientific man, and naturally it was convenient for study abroad to find almost every book he wanted in his pocket. In society, when he chose to wake up, he was charming; and among men he was very popular, though, being strictly ungregarious in his instincts, and quite happy at home, he never made any intimate friends, and never went out unless coaxed thereto by Berry.

"You should have married some frump," she said to him one day—"a dummy to mend your shirts, sit by your fireside—"

"But I never fancied dummies," he said; "if you had not been what you are, I should not have married you."

"Somebody to wash and dress you every morning, wheel you out in a perambulator to where you want to go—and come with it to fetch you home in good time!" Berry concluded, out of patience and breath. "But do you think I *am* so very pretty, Ned?"

"Of course I do. I never see any woman worth your little finger, or half as well turned out, or such good form. Trust Edgar Booth for being a judge of looks."

Berry laughed as she shook her head.

"I should be much more beautiful and interesting to you if I developed some new and curious disease," she said; and he would reply that he wished for no alteration in her but one—and that lay in her temper.

"She must not argue with him—once for all."

"That is just the fault I complain of in you," Berry said, "for of course you *can't* argue—men never can. Though I would rather you argued with me, than sat and played chess all the evening! Now I have made up my mind to be most *particular* as to whom I marry next time—and in the first place he sha'n't play chess."

"He might do worse," said Mr. Booth.

"Well—one of these days you will see the end of it. I shall fall in love deeply—despairingly—and it will be all your fault!"

"I'm not afraid," Mr. Booth would say, with his eyes on the chessmen; "you've threatened me with that these five years. But if you want to, why" (and there was a touch of sternness in his voice) "do it, and don't talk about it."

She had made none of those threats lately, but more than once had longed to say: "Ned, don't you think a husband ought to be a help to his wife, and when she is in trouble, or when she feels like doing something wrong, oughtn't he to protect her and save her?" but the words had never been spoken, though any man less careless than Mr. Booth must have seen the trouble lately going on in his wife's mind. It was *his duty* to see it, but he did not; her terror-struck wakings at night, the bare feet thrust suddenly out, and carrying her startled and trembling into the midst of the room, the stifled cries when asleep, the half broken words, No! no! I can not or I will not! All these signs of brain and heart disturbance might have aroused the attention of some husbands, but they passed unnoticed by Edgar Booth. Only, this morning, Berry felt that all his short-comings toward her were less than

nothing, in the scales of her gigantic debt toward him. For she had withdrawn from him her heart—after so many trials she had at last taken it away from him and he did not know it, but in his careless way neglected to look into the casket to make sure that he held it safe! Perhaps his very security in it made her feel more guiltily her theft—it was like robbing a child that is asleep, or going away with a treasure that a man has placed in your hands for safety.

"But I'll get it back again for you!" she said aloud, and with a sob that might have wakened him; but he still slept on, with an almost sculptural severity in the Greek lines of his face, so that, but for his breathing, you might have thought him dead.

As she gazed at him, she thought that there might be physical reasons for the lassitude, the increasing apathy, and loss of life and spirits he had shown during the last few years. He was not so when she had married him—scholar and student though he might be—and many memories of romps and jokes, of quips and quirks that they had shared together, rushed back to-day upon her mind. Was it she who had saddened him? did any failure of his love for and duty to *her* weigh upon him? No! she was too deep in his heart to leave room for any rival, and if she sometimes thwarted and tormented him, and if, as he sometimes said, he often kissed her because, if he did not, he should smack her, she knew that it was no discontent with her or his home that had wrought this change in him.

So absorbed was she in her thoughts of him, that she never looked at the letter in her hand; and Hugo Holt receded to an immeasurable distance, but not beyond the boundary of her mental sight.

Presently Mr. Booth opened his eyes, and, seeing her there, and the trouble in her face, he put his long arms round her, and stroked her head.

"Do you feel quite well, Ned?" she said, as she kissed him, more fondly far than she had done for some months; "You looked so pale in your sleep just now."

"I am perfectly well," he said, rather sharply, and she knew, as she moved away, that she had vexed him. He always hated to be thought ill, and he had a morbid shrinking from pain, or the witnessing of pain in others, that amounted almost to a monomania.

"I am perfectly well," he replied, "only rather worried about the lawsuit; but we shall know better how things stand when you have seen Hugo Holt."

"Couldn't you come with me?" she said—lingering a moment on her way to the door.

"My dear child, I have to be at the College of Surgeons all the morning. And you understand a great deal more about the business than I do."

And Berry urged him no more. She was not afraid of Hugo Holt now.

CHAPTER IX.

"Such griefs with such men well agree,
But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?
To be beloved is all I need,
And when I love, I love indeed."

ABOVE Hugo Holt's chambers in Lely Place should have been inscribed "The World's Fair," instead of the modest 9, painted to right and left of the entrance.

For hither came the great and the wealthy, the wise and the foolish, the Jew and the Christian, the peeress and the player, the defrauder and the defrauded, and they made a long and brilliant following day by day, as they impatiently waited their turn for admission to the man who listened much, and said little, and ticked off his clients with a rapidity that a less shrewd and cautious man might have striven to imitate in vain.

Berry's heart sunk when she found herself in the midst of an assemblage variously afflicted in reputation, morals, or estate; and she had consigned herself to three or four hours of waiting, when a clerk approached, and led the way through a volley of indignant glances that should have shriveled her, to an inner room, communicating with another, where he left her.

She sat quite still, recalling vividly the first time she had come here, and wishing with all her heart and soul that she had never crossed the threshold. Again she saw the door at the end unclose and a dark stern-faced man come toward her, and as she gazed at the panels it seemed almost as if by mere looking she could summon him, and that it would be for the first time in their lives that they would meet. She started up and began to look at some of the portraits on the walls. She had been looking at them a full half hour when a door opened and shut sharply behind her, and she half turned, knowing that it was Hugo Holt.

He had received her card without surprise, only he had expected her sooner. He knew that in love it is only an imperative question of which can live longest without the other, and her patience had given out first, as a woman's always does.

But as she turned her fresh morning face over her shoulder he knew that, from whatever reason she had run away from him some weeks ago, she was in no fear of him today—that it was only a charming woman in difficulties who had come to see him.

"How do you do?" she said. "I am so sorry, so dreadfully sorry, to be obliged to come and worry you; indeed, I would not if I could possibly have helped it."

He dropped her hand from his cold clasp and sat down at his table, motioning her to a chair. Her first impression of him was not softened as she looked at the austere, grave face before her, and she colored as she said:

"We have some bad news of the lawsuit about which I consulted you last December. Perhaps you will remember that my husband's estates, which he inherited from a cousin, are claimed by another person, whom until recently we believed to be an impostor. But there is some fresh evidence. I have all the papers here." And she produced a little packet tied smartly up with a blue ribbon and gave it to him.

She sat watching the dark lines of his face as he rapidly mastered the facts before him, and, in spite of herself, a feeling of joy took possession of her. She was in his company, she might even be in it five whole minutes. And it was only when she was out of his sight that she was afraid of him! Once within it, she felt that her tongue recovered its tartness, her cheek its color, and if her hand had trembled when it tied her bonnet-strings, it was firm enough when it touched his just now.

He looked up suddenly, and caught her eyes with that earnest happy look in them, fixed on his face.

"Why were you out when I called the other day?" he said.

"*Did* you call?" said Berry, very much taken aback, but preserving a great air of innocence.

"You know I did. Who was that good-looking young man I saw you walking with that afternoon?"

"Oh! a very good young man; he was at Ladisloes that night you came. By the way, why did you come to Ladisloes?"

"You have not answered my question," he said; "why did you run away the other day? Were you afraid of me?"

Berry laughed.

"If I were afraid," she said, "should I be venturing into the lion's den? And if I did—happen to go out that day, I"—the corners of her mouth trembled—"I sent you a card for my Friday afternoons!"

She knew by the expression of his face, as well as if he had spoken, that he would have liked to beat her.

"Do you think Mr. Poore is so good-looking?" she said, still with that look of mischief in her face, "I like him so much—and I hate good-looking men!"

"Then perhaps you will like me," he said, regarding her with the air of calm observation that seemed natural to his features, as if his calmness were in his blood, and not assumed or acquired.

"Yes," she said, looking at him quickly, eagerly even, "I suppose you are plain."

He smiled—then both burst out laughing.

"This is not business," said Berry, drawing herself up, shocked at herself, and at the strides to intimacy that she was making with Mr. Holt. For a minute or two he returned to the papers, and she got up from her chair, and moved toward the window.

She was thinking how strange it was that her heart had not beat one whit the faster; that no tremor, no nervousness had hindered her speech to him since she entered the room; that for weeks and weeks she had thought of him with mingled fear and longing. Her husband's spell must be still upon her, or, with the cessation of Hugo's liking for her, her own fancy had died out. Yes, it must be that, and she might be thankful that she was safe beyond the reach of temptation.

She turned to see him standing close behind her, and he observed how the light just tipped the red-brown of her hair, the white of her rounded chin, and touched with scarlet the smooth cheek and under lip that gave promise of a touch of obstinacy in her character.

"Can you come here to-morrow?" he said; "it is impossible for me to give an opinion on the case to-day."

"To-morrow!" She echoed the sound like an urchin to whom the magic word "holiday" is shouted when he expects "school!"

"Would not my husband do as well?" she said, trying to keep out of her eyes the joy that danced in them.

"No—your husband would not do," he said, coldly, as he turned aside. "The notes in these papers are all in your handwriting; you seem to understand the matter thoroughly."

"Good-bye!" she said, as she put out her hand, "there are such crowds of people waiting for you—and the women are all so pretty!"

"Are they?" he said, carelessly, as they clasped hands; "then I shall expect you to-morrow."

And she thought he looked more stern than ever, when he bowed for a moment over her hand, before he opened the door for her to pass out.

CHAPTER X.

"And if she moves unquietly,
Perchance 'tis but the blood so free
Comes back and tingles in her feet;
No doubt she has a vision sweet."

SOME of the purest, happiest moments of Berry's life were about this time spent in Hugo Holt's room. They were brief moments, snatched in the midst of business consultations, of clerks coming in and out to their chief, of telegrams and dispatches, or even an occasional invasion of the same spirited fair one who had made a bold dash for his door, and even stormed it in spite of the sleepless custodian without.

It was in the snatches of talk that she got with him, while clerks were copying the necessary instructions, or papers being prepared for her husband's case, that Berry discovered what a delightful companion he could be. Living as he did in the midst "of the best that is thought and known in the world," with a brilliant intellect, and a

temperament keenly alive to every form of beauty in nature and art, he saw and enjoyed life from a standpoint that few commanded; and if he labored continuously, he yet knew how to extract the greatest possible pleasure out of the materials for happiness put in his way. He could have said with Byron "I have lived my life;" and he might have added that he continued to live it in the fullest sense of the word. His mind grasped everything, just as nothing escaped his observation, and as from the high pressure at which he lived he had no time for trivialities, so in his talk you found none. Involuntarily Berry felt her intellectual life quickened, and her mind become informed by his; a word of lightning suggestion was enough for her, and for the first time she knew the keen delight of a bright clever woman in a companionship that at once taught and brought out all that was best in her. He had been everywhere, he knew everything, the lightest of his words seemed more pregnant to her than the best conversation of any man she had hitherto met—and she had probably met all the best talkers, and most brilliant men of the day.

But precious as these flying moments of converse were, she never sought to prolong them; and when the papers were ready, she would be gone like a swallow, and Hugo Holt never sought to stay her, never by word or look transgressed the line of conduct that he had laid down for himself on the morning of her first visit, now some three weeks ago.

She wondered how she could ever have been afraid of him, how her stupid, mad infatuation could have so terrified her into such a wrong estimate of him; and at this period of her life no infant ever felt safer in the arms of its mother, than Berry did in the society of Hugo Holt.

On the other hand, as if her purity had touched his heart with its wand, he was growing to feel for her very differently to when she had snatched his fancy, more

quickly and violently perhaps than any woman had ever done yet.

He grew to long for a sight of the little bright head shining among his books; to feel as if a sunbeam had made its home with him when she moved to and fro, looking at the pictures on the walls; to listen when alone for the sound of the voice that let fall such delightful things, never a spiteful or unmeaning one, and to place her higher and higher above other women, because she was at once so bright and—to him—so lovely and so good.

I don't know what the quality of mind and heart may be that makes one woman so the complement of a man's nature that he is perfectly happy in her company, and only feels his existence complete when she is with him. Probably every man has felt this at least once in his life, and probably it is at its greatest perfection when its object is unattainable, for of its very nature it would cease were such happiness always within its reach.

When the woman is equally attracted—and whether it be animal magnetism, or will-force, or the like to like, who shall say?—then the risk run by these two persons is a terrible one. They will act and react upon each other, and the very strength of will that drags them apart, will but the further precipitate them toward each other. But I think that at this time Hugo Holt willed only that she should be happy, and that no trouble of any kind should ever come upon her.

One day, and it was her last visit but one to him, she said:

"She looks very nice, doesn't she?"

"Who?"

Berry pointed to one of the prettiest portraits in the room, carefully turned with its face to the wall. A thrill shot through him. Was she jealous? But he only said, "You are different from every other woman I ever knew in

my life," and when he next looked up, the picture was hanging with its eyes fixed on him as before.

Berry sometimes wondered how many of those women had been, or were in love with him —and with how many he himself was in love. Of course he flirted—what else could be expected of so rich and celebrated a man? His only hinderance, probably, was lack of time—that moral strait-waistcoat in which many a man is encased, to his own immense benefit, and an abiding satisfaction to his own virtue.

On the same day she said to him:

"Which is the master in your house—you or Mrs. Holt?"

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't know."

Berry looked at him keenly, then she clapped her hands softly.

"But *I* do," she cried, "it is you. If you had protested that you were master, I should know that you were not."

Then she sighed.

"She is happy to have some one to talk to her as you do," she said.

"I do not talk to her," he said; "at least, not as I talk to you—she would not understand me."

"But she has gone with you to all these places," said Berry, looking at a book-shelf full of books about the places he had visited.

"Not at all. But why does not Booth take you abroad? For your art's sake you should travel, you should see everything."

"My art?" Berry laughed rather drearily. "That is nearly dead—strangled in me by my surroundings. But it was always a poor thing, never worth the cultivation."

"I should like to see how you work," he said. "I shall come some day to watch you at your easel."

"You will be welcome," she said, simply, and the day

came when Hugo Holt did see her work—but never in Brook Street.

CHAPTER XI.

"Rejoice, and men will seek you,
Grieve, and they turn and go;
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not want your woe;
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all;
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall."

MR. BOOTH did not appear to find it odd that his wife should go four or five times to Mr. Holt's rooms to attend to her husband's business, and, concluding that if any one could bring affairs to a successful conclusion, that man was Hugo Holt, he immersed himself more deeply in science than ever.

The day of the trial came. His presence was not required at it, but about one o'clock Berry received a letter from Hugo Holt, sent by hand, asking her if she could call upon him at once.

She trembled a little as she read it, for she knew that their case was lost.

When she had dressed, she passed into her boudoir, and looked round it much as if she had never seen it before, though now she noted everything, even the pattern of the porcelain tiles, the pure white of its china, the white and blue-green of the walls, her favorite books in the long, low book-shelf, and the table at which she wrote; then she pushed aside one of the blue and white portières, and went into the painting-room beyond.

A half-finished picture stood on the easel—she had not advanced a step with it during the last three weeks, and her palette lay where she had dashed it down, in a fit of utter self-disgust and hatred of her own work.

She picked the palette up, and arranged the brushes, then she went out, and down to the drawing-rooms, where she walked with the same slow and heedful step; and here, I regret to say, all sorts of Biblical texts recurred to her mind, one of which was, "The house that thou madest so fair for thine own self," and others, too, crowded upon her as she went down into the dining-room, sober in its maroon tints and old oak, save for the china shields and brasses upon the walls, and the great bowls of flowers wherever place for them could be found. At the end of this room, a door led into a long, narrow apartment, choked to the ceiling with books, some of which Edgar had selected for his wife to read, but they had not improved her mind, they only gave her mental indigestion. Now she looked at these books, and wished she had read more of them.

She found her husband where she had expected to find him, in a room reached by another door-way to the left, and, though she did not often enter by this way, he neither looked up, nor turned his head as she approached.

Again she was struck by that look of pallor, of approaching illness that he had reasoned her out of seeing during the past few weeks, and her heart sunk for him, and the news she would have to tell him.

When she was quite close, he looked up, passed his hand over his brow, and kissed her.

She held his head close to her bosom as she said:

"Ned, I am afraid there will be bad news presently—about the lawsuit. Mr. Holt wants to see me."

Mr. Booth got up from his chair, rubbed his hands, then kissed Berry again.

"Poor little girl!" he said, "you are quite pale; but don't take it to heart so much. We shall have a few hundreds a year, I suppose, and as long as we have got one another, and our health—and my books," he added, looking round, "we can be very happy."

Berry's lips quivered, but she said nothing. A man never understands how tables and chairs may come to assume the shape of old friends in a woman's heart, so that to part with them is like taking away a piece of her body itself.

"Good-bye, dear," she said; "I will be back as soon as possible."

He detained her to embrace her, with something of the ardor of his days of courtship.

"We can be very happy still," he said; "but, mind, Berry—you must not *argue*. Except for that, and tidying up, you are the best little woman in the world."

Berry laughed. As he did not analyze that laugh he thought she was taking things very well, and, after standing on the door-step to wave his long, thin hand at her, and smile, and nod his head several times, he went back much in his usual frame of mind to his studies.

Berry was not kept a moment waiting at Lely Place that day, but when she found herself in Hugo Holt's room, it was empty.

A restless, miserable feeling came over her as she thought of how it was probably the last time she would come hither; and the feeling of safety, of happiness that she had lately known here, suddenly left her.

She dreaded to hear the door open, and looked in a small glass near to see if her face betrayed her, but she could only see that it was pale, and that her eyes were shining like stars. And then she heard him come in, and went to meet him.

His eyes, too, were brilliant, and there was more color than usual in his face; perhaps he held her hand a moment longer, too. Then he said:

"I have bad news for you. The lawsuit has gone against Mr. Booth, and the new heir takes everything."

"I knew you had sent for me to tell me that," she said, quite calmly. "Thank you very much for all you

have done for us—if the case could have been saved you would have saved it."

He saw how pale she was, her eyes wandered round the room as if she saw nothing, and if she had looked at him, she must have seen that he, too, was unlike himself.

"Is there anything that I can do for you, any help I can give you about your future arrangements?" he said.

"Thank you again—but our solicitor will see to all that. I shall go to him straight from here."

"And what will you do?" he said, and she understood that his question referred to her future.

"I shall work now," she said, looking down at her hand, from which she had just now stripped the glove, and Hugo Holt looked at it too, at the pink and the white, and the azure of it, and thought how frail a bulwark it was between her and destitution.

He did not speak, but when she looked at him, her own eyes filled with tears.

"It is not so bad as all that," she said, trembling. "Ned has a few hundreds a year—about as many as we have lost thousands—and it will keep us from starving, even if I never touch a paint-brush again."

Her face was like the sweet, sorrowful one of a child that one longs to take in one's arms, and part the hair from its brow, and console it. Hugo drew a sharp, inward breath, but made no step forward, nor answered her.

"And you have been so kind to me," she went on with trembling lips, and indeed in that moment she felt that a bond closer and dearer than that of love existed between them. "I was rude to you once, but I am sorry for it now, and I have often wanted to beg your forgiveness, and in the future can we not be friends?"

His brow grew dark beneath the blood that surged up to it, her very sweetness, her lovableness was pleading against her—had she been less sweet, less perfectly suited

to him in the body, soul, and mind, he might have been her friend only, and so have spared her. He turned from her and passed out by an inner door, closing it sharply behind him as he went.

For a minute she stood gazing at the shut door with dilated eyes.

"Is he coming back?" she said, in a whisper, a sudden awful sense of loneliness and misery oppressing her; involuntarily she clasped her hands together as she turned to go, but had not gone many steps when she knew that he had returned.

As, blinded by her tears, she put out both hands and groped for the door, something in her attitude and look reminded Hugo of that most pathetic and lovely picture where Lady Jane Grey, with covered eyes, feels her way to the block. Would he not remember it again in the days that were to come, when, having blinded her eyes with love, *his* hands should surely guide the woman he loved to a place of shameful death?

Oh! woe for her and for him that they did not part in that hour as friends for ever and ever; ay, but as friends who should never meet again!

As he wiped the tears from her cheeks, she smiled up at him, and promised that she would shed no more, and when they were all dried she said:

"I want you to make me a promise, that you will not come to see me until I send for you."

"When will that be?" he said, slowly, grudgingly, his eyes growing to her face.

"I can not tell. But you will promise?"

"On condition that you send for me soon."

"No," she said, "it will not be soon. And we shall be very poor, and perhaps"—but the look in his face checked her words.

"I would go to you in a garret," he said, passionately; then, perhaps to faintly still the desperate hunger that

was in his heart, he lifted her hand to his dry lips, and kissed it.

The burning touch sent no thrill through her, but moved by a sudden impulse she stooped her own bright head over his other hand, and pressed her lips upon it.

"No! no!" he cried, stepping back, and before he could detain her, even had he willed to do it, she was gone; and that was all the farewell that lay between Beryl Booth and Hugo Holt during the long months in which they were divided.

CHAPTER XII.

"Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by;
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a long and lordly train;
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisle of pain."

September 10*th*, 1884.

"My dearest Hetty,—You upbraid me with not writing to you, but it is because I have had nothing to say, and I used to have so much! You know that after our furniture and the lease of our house was sold we went to some of Ned's people in Norfolk, and when we came back to town early in July we settled down in these rooms, and have been here ever since. We might have gone to the sea-side, but Ned said he must be near the places where he gets his books of reference, etc., and so we have been baking and grilling here for two months. He sits hour after hour in a little room that I have fitted up into a study for him, with the hair wet on his forehead, and as pale as a nicely boiled turnip, but he never complains, and seems perfectly happy. He has got all that he wants. His books, his pickles, his chessboard and men, his slippers, and lastly —me. As to his other surroundings, he doesn't care a button, and I might hang the room with Eastern stuffs, and furnish them with gold and silver, and I don't believe he would see the difference, and I am sure he would prefer them as they are. But oh! Hetty, I

grieve over my dear little house—every day I miss it more, and my present surroundings cause me positive pain. I love all beautiful and pleasant things—they satisfy some craving in my nature that was born with me; they are food and drink to me, and I seem to be always hungry, and to grow less and less used to my altered life. The woman who can be happy with a magenta feather and a green pair of gloves is a person to be envied: you never hear her moans in three volumes, you do not meet her with orange-colored hair and black eyebrows in æsthetic society, she either bides at home in the midst of artificial flowers under glass cases, or goes to the play with her 'Arry, supremely happy to the end. It is a curse to a woman with a perfect sense of what is artistic and lovely to have that sense outraged every minute and hour in the day. You should see my wall papers, and my carpets here! my bedroom, where I can conveniently open the door and the wardrobe as I sit in bed, while my bath has to be placed half under the chimney to make room for it at all! Perhaps I miss my flowers most—I never buy any now—and next to them, the bright society I used to mix with, and the clever people who came to see me. I was kept intellectually alive, but now I am out of it, and two or three vulgar people have cut me. Who are they? you will ask. They are nobodies, of course—persons dependent on the excellence of their feeds for the quality of their company. All my *friends* have stuck by me—they would come to me in an attic if they knew where the attic was, but I have thought it best neither to visit nor to return visits in our altered position, and scarcely any one knows where to find us; and except by my intimate friends I shall not be missed. I never was a personage in either smart society or in the literary or artistic sets. To succeed in London you must be a man, though if you are a rich woman, and if you spend the greater part of it in giving luncheons and dinners, you have a good chance of holding your own.

"I am growing used to my carriage and pair, with the coachman before, and the footman to help me up behind, that is so conveniently waiting for me in almost every street; but I have not yet been able to determine where true politeness ends, and where insolence begins, when I ride in it. If a man offers me his hand when I get in, I always say 'Thank you,' and if I don't fire the word off like a pistol at him, he usually squeezes my arm. Nevertheless, during this stifling heat I have sometimes said to Ned, 'Take me out somewhere—anywhere—on the top of an omnibus even, to get away for a little while from these stuffy rooms!' But I might as well ask the monument to take me out for an airing. Save for my needle-work,

my life would be profound and utter stagnation. You will say it is wicked of me not to be happy in exercising the one talent that God has given me; but lately the power in me to do work—good work—has shriveled up, and only aimless fancies come and go in my mind as I stand in the little bare attic in which I have set up my easel. You will say then, why do you not remember your public? I do remember it—I love my public—when I am at my lowest depths, and I think of the thousands to whom I have furnished matter for a laugh or a tear, I am cheered. They do not pay for it, as a rule, so perhaps they enjoy it the more, and the picture-dealer enjoys the profits, so that we are all satisfied, or ought to be. But not even the thought of these many invisible friends can inspire my brush, and I feel as if only some violent emotion or shock would ever restore in me the power to paint again. Shall you come back from Dieppe before the end of the month? No, dear—you must not ask that, for I know you *will* ask me now that you know I am being baked alive; but I can't go to you—at least for a long while. I am anxious about Ned, though he is perfectly easy about himself. But when you are well at Ladisloes, I will go to you if only for a day; and how we will talk! Good-bye, my dearest. Love to Chummy.

"Always your loving friend,

"BERRY.

"You ask me if I have seen Mr. Holt lately. I have not for over four months; but I see by the papers that he returned from Egypt yesterday, and I am going to write and ask him to come and see me."

"*Dieppe, Sept. 15th, '84.*

"MY DARLING BERRY,—I know your obstinacy of old, and that it's no good to try and get you *here*. But why in the name of health can't you go to Ladisloes, and stay there till I come back? It is only ten miles from town, and your spouse could get up and down easily, and carry all his musty, fusty, rusty old books with him, if the library down there isn't enough to satisfy the most abject book-worm that ever crawled! And I do think he ought to be ashamed of himself, keeping you in town in such weather! Why didn't he marry a chessboard, or an Encyclopædia Britannica, instead of a convivial little soul like you, who never was born to live alone? I think you have been a little fool about him, and far too strict in denying yourself everything that he could not share. You would go nowhere without him; you refused to be introduced to all sorts of

high people who would be glad to know you, but didn't want him; and if you had not been so absurdly straitlaced, you would have been one of the most brilliant and courted women of the day now, no matter what money losses you might have sustained. You are thrown away upon him, my dear, and you can tell him so, with my compliments, if you please! Now if you were Mrs. Holt (how odd it is that these clever men always marry second-rate women) you would be a supremely happy woman. But as you can't be, take very good care that you don't become his sweetheart! You are in far more danger of him now, in your narrowed life, than ever you were before; and if you are not careful, every trifle connected with him will assume gigantic proportions in your mind. Don't see him! but go to Ladisloes instead, and I will leave Dieppe a fortnight earlier on your account. I am rather worried about Lola; she coughs a great deal, and I should not be at all surprised if I have to take her abroad for the winter. If so, you must come too! I wish that you were here; your brush would not be long idle. I don't wonder that you can't paint. Who could expect it when you never travel, and have never been out of your own little island in your life?"

Mrs. Booth had got thus far in her friend's letter when the door of her sitting-room opened, and Frowzibella, the servant, announced Mr. Holt.

CHAPTER XIII.

"And if I love thee, what is that to thee?"

"WHY did you not send for me before?" he said, when they had shaken hands and were sitting opposite each other on two ugly horse-hair chairs.

She knew then that he had not felt their separation half as keenly as she had done—that he had, to a certain extent, forgotten her—but that was inevitable. In a man's crowded life, and such a life as his, it was impossible for him to keep the mirror of his memory for one face only.

"I have been away," she said, "and so have you. I

envied you in Egypt—and if you had time, I should ask you to tell me all about it."

"There is so little to tell," he said. "I think that the pleasure of our travels depends on the people who are with us, and not upon the things we actually see. And what have you been doing during these four months?"

"I have been idle," she said, "and wicked. I told you that I was going to work—and I have done nothing!"

He gave one quick glance round the room, then at her, and said:

"You have no flowers."

She colored brilliantly.

"How did you know that I cared for them?" she said.

"Because I have never seen you without a flower, or the suggestion of one somewhere about your dress."

She drew a little work-table toward her, the only sign of her occupation in the bare, gaudy room, and took from it a half-stitched wristband; but when she would have worked, she found the thread loose, and held her needle up to thread it. For once, however, her will was powerless to control her actions, and after a moment, Mr. Holt said:

"You can not see to thread that—let me do it."

She let him take it, and watched him as he did it—a little awkwardly perhaps—but cleverly; and she thought that with such fine, beautiful hands it would be almost impossible for him to do anything ill. But he kept the scrap of work in his hands as he said, "You are not looking well. How long have you been back in town?"

"Since the first of July."

He made an impatient movement; perhaps he was contrasting her time with his, during the past six months; perhaps he was remembering how she had looked when in his private room she had first come up to meet him; then:

"You must get to work again," he said, abruptly,

almost decisively; "make up your mind that you will begin to-morrow."

"I have no subject," she said. "I am like Charlotte Brontë in one thing only, that I can not work when I have accumulated—when I feel—nothing. If some one came to me now, and said, 'I will give you a thousand guineas for a sketch,' I could not paint it."

If she had glanced at him then, she would have seen that slight in-drawing of the lips, which was the only sign of feeling that he ever showed. Then he said:

"I like you in white."

She looked down at her gown, and blushed.

"My washer-woman is my only extravagance," she said, and held out her hand for the needle-work.

He let her take it—no man let trifles go more easily, or great issues with more difficulty than Hugo Holt.

He saw that she planted her stitches perfectly, and with a firm hand. A more cruel man would have said something to shake it, and exert his power; but this one had too much inherent strength to care about display, and he watched her with a sense of pleasure in the womanliness of her occupation.

"You have not told me about Egypt," she said.

"And you have not told me about yourself."

Berry laughed, and into her face came some of the old gamesome look that he knew.

"Oh!" she cried, "you are determined to talk neither of yourself nor of your enemy. But I have nothing to tell you—'*Ici j'y suis, ici j'y reste*'—probably to my dying day. We are conveniently placed for the Museum, the College of Surgeons, and other emporiums of knowledge—and if I want a glimpse of the green, why, there's the square opposite."

"Does not your husband mean to go in for some employment?" he said.

"No. His life-work is his book—I would not let him do any other work if he wished it."

"But these people who have cut you out of everything, have they offered nothing?"

"Why should they? For one thing the heir doesn't know how to spell—so he can't write to us, and I doubt if his wife can help him, for you know he married his cook."

Mr. Holt walked to the window and looked out. She watched him standing there, and thought how well and sunburned he looked, how supple and good his figure, with an air of distinction that marked him out amidst crowds. The sense of repose on his strength that always came to her in his company was strong upon her then, and when he turned back to her the work was lying on her knee, and joy danced in the dimples of her cheeks, upon her lips, and in her eyes.

"You look better already," he said. "I am afraid Booth leaves you too much alone. But you will be more yourself when you settle down to work again."

"Why do you take such an interest in my work?" she said, thinking how different was this keen solicitude for her fame, to Mr. Booth's perfect indifference to her pursuits.

"You have genius," he said, "and it must not be wasted."

"Genius?" she cried, "oh, no! Did you ever know a woman who had genius keep her house clean inside and out, and have fresh curtains up every fortnight? If you had seen how tidy I used to be—no, decidedly I have no genius. My *husband* is very clever—but I am only—or so the critics say—lucky."

"You are far more clever than your husband," said Mr. Holt, coolly. "I should say he was very good at amassing knowledge, but he has not an original mind—and you have."

"But his is a great one," said Beryl, jealous for Edgar's honor, "and of course all that I do must seem very frivolous to him. Yet I sometimes think of what Oliver Wendell Holmes says about scientific men," she added, rather sadly; "and I am afraid that it is true. But I am proud of your good opinion all the same," she added, "though you ought to scold me as Hans Andersen's mother did when she told him that 'if he would only get rid of his own little I' he would do very well."

"But I would rather hear you talk about yourself than any one else in the world."

"And I would rather hear you talk about yourself than any one else in the world."

He smiled, and shook his head.

"Let us talk of our neighbors, then," he said. "You remember Mrs. Q——'s elopement a little while ago?"

"Yes. She was a wicked woman—she left two or three little children behind."

"Her husband has taken her back."

"He took her back?" cried Berry, with flashing eyes, "how *could* he?"

"He had neglected her," said Mr. Holt, "and had thrown her constantly into the company of the other man."

"That is no reason," said Berry, proudly; "but, oh! if I were wicked, and my husband took me back—what a life I would lead him, to be sure!"

"You would not be grateful to him?" said Mr. Holt, his eyes drinking up the scorn and passion of her expressive face.

"I should loathe him! It is a thing that no man should ever forgive, that he *ought* not to forgive; and, in her heart, the woman who is forgiven despises him, and only waits an opportunity to betray him a second time."

"You think that a woman never recovers one false step—perhaps the only one she has made in her life?"

"After marriage—never. A married woman never

stops at one lover. She feels her degradation, and her own smarting pain vents itself on *him*. He tires. A man sees himself at his noblest in the admiring light of a woman's eye, at his worst when those eyes reproach him as the murderer of all that was best in her. So he leaves her, and she—"

Beryl broke off impatiently in her speech, and made a gesture as if she thrust the subject from her.

"Then you do not think," he said, watching her keenly, "that a married woman might have one great passion in her life, and love one man truly and faithfully to the end?"

"She might do it, to her own heart-breaking loss, but, for the object of her love, she would have lost her charm. There is one quality in a woman that a man secretly values in her, beyond her beauty, beyond her genius (if she has it), beyond all the love and sweetness that she can give him, and that is, her modesty. Without it, she is like any other woman to him."

"You have never been tempted," he said, rather impatiently; "you underrate the power of love and its patience."

"No, I have never been tempted," she said ruefully, "perhaps it is because I never allowed any one to come near enough;" and she laughed aloud with the heart-whole laugh of a child who, never having been burned, has no dread of the fire.

"Some day your turn will come," he said quietly, as he got up to put on his overcoat.

"You are going?" said Berry, in a voice that she thought sounded gay, while the color ebbed out of her face, and her hands fell weak and helpless on her knees.

"Yes. You will let me come and see you again?"

"If you have time. But you will not."

"I shall come. How tall you are!" he said, as she stood up beside him, and he took one of her poor little

hands in his; "and how lovely," he added, as he kissed her palm.

She looked at him wistfully, eagerly, as if she were trying to imprint his features on her mind; then she said "good-bye," as brightly as if she were greeting him with a "good-morrow."

He kissed her hand again, and went out. From where she stood, she saw him get into his carriage, and without looking back, drive away.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Sometimes the test of faithfulness in marriage is an enchanted horn, out of which no unchaste man or woman can drink without spilling some of the liquor contained in it; or it is a mantle which will fit none but chaste women, but shrivels into air when assumed by one who has betrayed her lord—or it is a cup of tears which become dark in the hands of inconstancy."

As if the armfuls of flowers that Hugo Holt brought her each time he came, put new freshness and beauty into her starved life, Berry began to recover her brightness and spirits, and her power of imagination and work returned.

She would go upstairs every morning to her attic studio almost as swiftly as a bird, and, while there, would sing to herself so happily that the maid-of-all-work, listening, would nod her shaggy head and say:

"She makes the house laugh!"

Edgar Booth felt the change in her too, and in his abstracted way rejoiced. He had come to miss the tricks she loved to play him, the perpetnal ripples of life that her frolicksome ways had made round him; but he never thought of connecting the change in her with Hugo Holt. He was usually out, on the occasions of that gentleman's rare visits; but once he happened to be at home, and

Berry had the opportunity of hearing some learned conversation between the pair.

But whether Mr. Holt took away with him as much pleasure as he left behind it would be hard to say, but knowing his character, I think that long before December he must have discovered that she was even further out of his reach now than when he first met her.

If her eyes expressed joy at his coming, her tongue had developed an unexpected sharpness that surprised him; and not the most experienced woman of the world could have better turned aside his subtle hints of love than did this one, who so frankly delighted in his company as *bon camarade.*

For a woman who was not a *mondaine,* but who knew her world thoroughly, there was a curious simplicity in her attitude toward him. As her trust in him grew, so his fascination for her lessened; familiarity to a certain extent bred contempt, and this quiet, cultivated man who sat by her side and talked to her as she worked, as if no such spot as Lely Place existed, gradually became harmless in her eyes as a lover, though she hugged herself with the thought that she had got him now safely for her friend.

He was very strong, very patient at this time, his self-control was so great that it seemed easy to lead him, and while he was lulling her fears to rest, she did not know that by his very strength and reticence he was charming the heart out of her breast, and binding it securely to his own.

It is odd how a woman will go on loving a man more and more, yet only want him for her friend (and perhaps no man realizes how much longer she will cling to an affection than a passion), and how a man will go on loving a woman more and more—for himself. The one wants a colorless shadow that will yet content her; the man wants the real living woman, or he will leave her. Ineradicable,

planted even deeper in the human heart than the love of life, is the love of man for woman, and beyond his ambition, his duty, his successes, is his determination to obtain that which he has, with his whole soul, once coveted. In those lightning moments when Hugo Holt and Berry seemed to talk of everything in heaven and earth, the conversation used persistently to return to the theme of love, principally in those aspects when it became a crime, though the world would shrug its shoulders, and at its worst called it *une indiscrétion.*

Berry's views were uncompromising on the point, and the insidious arguments of the man of the world fell flat against the shield that she opposed to them. Perhaps the devil smiled when he saw the false security in which she was lapped; perhaps he laughed when he heard her trying to teach Hugo Holt that a woman may have a good influence over a man's life, though his love for her may at its rise have been a sin. Hugo endured all her sweet little lectures like an angel, and was a stoic under the slight liberties she permitted herself with him, such as a touch of the hand, or a bit of news read over his shoulder, or one of his own flowers placed in his button-hole; but he meant to revenge himself by and by.

He thought that he had long ago taken the full measure of her bodily and mental charms; but he was mistaken. Each time that he saw her, he got some new glimpse of her character, and when he was surest of her, he found himself most mistaken.

"You would have suited me," he said, at the end of his fourth visit, when, having helped him on with his coat, she was standing before him.

"And I am not at all sure that you would have suited me," she said, gravely.

"I should like to beat you," he said, as quietly as herself.

Berry laughed.

"I have heard you described as the best-bred man in

London," she said; "it is a pity that some of your admirers can not hear that speech."

He said, "You are different from every other woman that I have ever met in my life."

Perhaps the devil tempted her, for she said, "Are you so used to women falling in love with you?" As she looked up, she thought how black, how glittering looked his eyes, as, with his head thrown back, he buttoned his coat.

"Do you know," she went on, as he did not answer, "I can not see anything *in* you, apart from your brains, to fall in love with."

But still he made her no answer, so she said, "But you may love whom you please—flirt with whom you choose—only you must like *me* the best!"

"And how about yourself?" he said, dryly. "I thought you seemed very happy with Will Strange the other night."

"You were in attendance," she said, her lips curling a little, "and I must talk to somebody, and he was near. Did you like my gown?" she added, with that impulse of folly which will impel a saint to forget herself, if clothes are concerned.

"I can't remember," he said, knitting his brows; "but you looked different from everybody else."

"So my robe of beaten gold was wasted on you," she said; "and I put one on so seldom now. I am the reverse of King Cophetua's wife—all my steps are backward instead of forward."

"When your picture is done you will have taken a new departure," he said; "you could not have painted in Brook Street as you will paint here."

"But you forget," she said, "that all my best work was done before I went to Brook Street, before I married."

"I did not know you then," he said, with a look that

was half-grudging, half-bitter, "but if I had, you should be my wife now."

"Oh! no!" she said, carelessly, "you forget you were married before I left school."

"I must seem very old to you," he said, "but I wish you would love me a little," he added, in so gentle a tone of reproach, that no one would have guessed that, as he said it, he flung self-restraint away, and made his first bold step toward attaining his end.

Berry laughed quite spontaneously, then said—

"I shall like you always—but I can not love you."

"You loved me once," he said.

"Yes," she replied slowly, "that is true. I fell in love with you—and I longed to see you, and I fretted after you—but now," she nodded her bright head triumphantly, "I've *quite* got over it!"

"Have you?" he said, gravely. "Well, I fell in love with you, too, and I have not got over it. You are the only woman in the world that I love."

"Oh!" she cried, clasping her hands, "do you know what you are doing? You are destroying the only perfect thing my life contains. You have made me suffer so much, but lately you have turned my life to sunshine—and now you would spoil it all, and make me miserable."

"I would make you perfectly happy," he said, "if you would only love me."

A look of horror grew in her face as she looked at him.

"Have we not often talked about that?" she said, her gray eyes shining in her pale face, "about what wickedness, what madness, such love is—and how it never lasts?"

"Mine would last for you all my life," he said, quietly.

"And I should hate you," she groaned out. "Oh! it must be all my fault—it must have been my bad behavior that has made you say this!"

He moved as if to approach her, and she stepped back and back, till her head leaned against the wall.

He drew a deep breath, walked swiftly up to her, and kissed her gently on the mouth.

She moaned like one suddenly struck to the ground, her hands fell to her sides. He could not face the anguish in the eyes she turned upon him.

"What have you done—what have you done?" she said; then cried out wildly, almost deliriously, "Oh! I can never wear the cloak again—the cloak that was not even crinkled at the hem—the cloak that none of them could wear save Craddock's wife, who had kissed his mouth

"Before he married me."

Then she trembled in every limb, and slipped to the floor, and he knew that she had fainted.

Did he relent in his purpose as he laid her on the sofa, and chafed her hands, and put back the heavy hair from her brow? No! he had sworn that this woman should be his, and he would make her happiness, as she should make his.

When he saw the first signs of returning life in her, he kissed her hair, and left her.

CHAPTER XV.

"Self-restraint is the product of a personal exertion, which in many instances is obtained at a great cost of feeling and will-force. To a large extent such a power is a native talent, and is found in connection with strong will-force and vigorous intellect. And there needs to be splendid equilibrium between the two."

Mrs. Booth was standing before a canvas stretched on her easel, and painting, as if her life depended on her toil being done by a given time.

It was a ghastly work, and there was a kind of rapt horror in her eyes as she painted swiftly on, the figures on the canvas seeming to spring into life as she touched them.

The figures were these: on a bed, reclining at full length, with his arms above his head, lay a man, whether dead or sleeping it was almost impossible to tell, for, though the *morbidezza* of the color was striking, the lips, a little apart, suggested a breath of life that came and went fitfully, but the gaunt outlines of the body, closely shrouded in a sheet, suggested death only. A flood of light fell on him from the upper part of a window, of which the lower half was shuttered, and more light entered the room from the partly opened door, round which a woman, huddling her skirts together, was peeping. There was something mocking, devilish even in the face that thus peered in on this dead or sleeping man—and the features were Berry's own, and the man was Edgar Booth. At the foot of the canvas, roughly scrawled in scarlet, ran the word, "Deserted."

As a lash with which to scourge herself and her sins, she was painting this picture, for her own eye alone; when it was done, she meant to lock it away, but look at it daily, and so she would have her transgressions ever in her mind.

Presently she threw down the brush, and passed her hand over her lips as if she swept from them some stain she felt to be there. She had been so proud, so pure, no lightest touch had ever soiled her till now, and in heart and lips alike she felt burned and seared by irretrievable dishonor.

"Love!" she cried aloud, "he never loved me—no man who loved a woman would so outrage her; and it is only because I am down in the world, because I am neglected by my husband, that he dared to do it!"

She looked at the picture, and then went on half aloud:

"Poor Ned! do you ever wonder why I do not kiss you now? It is because I feel myself as vile a thing, as faithless to you, as if I had left your roof for that of another man. One must be faithful in all, or not at all. When

I looked in on you as you lay asleep on that burning August morning, I was not faithful to you in heart, even if my lips were all your own—and that is why I have given myself the face of a devil, for the sin was there."

She walked to the window, and looked out at the swift-falling darkness of the short December day.

"In every woman's life there comes a great crisis," she thought; "George Eliot failed at hers, so did George Sand."

If she were too humble to compare herself with either of these two great women who had failed, Beryl yet felt that she could criticise and condemn them. For the veil had fallen from her eyes, and she knew herself to be tempted hard and fiercely. Will and Heart were so finely pitted against each other, and so skillful in attack and defense, that often it seemed a drawn game between them; but in her heart of hearts Berry knew that she was safe, and could contain her soul in the midst of the storm.

As she leaned her head against the window-sill she thought bitterly of the radical difference there is between a man's and a woman's love.

"I only want to be *quiet*," she thought, "only to sit beside him—to talk to him—and, yes, I should like to rest my head against his shoulder, if he would let me, without putting his arm round me—and a man can not feel it so, that she can love him so, like a woman over her child, and want no more, only that—perhaps it is a selfish love, to feel such delight in his company, and not to care if it is an equal delight to him to be near you—to have one's joy, and eat it greedily, not caring if he be happy, so long as you yourself are contented."

The darkness had almost descended by now, blotting out the figures on the canvas, the colors on the palette, and throwing a merciful mantle over the bleak bareness of the common, ugly room.

"Is it so wrong," she thought, looking at the muddied

stars of light that showed through the room, "to *love*—to feel all our best and holiest roused in us? and is it right to crush it back—to do violence to our nature with our every heart-beat? Nature! she is always lovely, always variable; she binds her creatures by no cruel withes—it is the Human only who is scourged and lashed forever by Duty, and the recognition of an invisible God!'

The lights faded before her eyes—they could not shine through the tears that filled them. She heard steps ascending the stairs, and for a moment her heart leaped, and she thought it might be her husband come in search of her; but no! it would never occur to him to climb so many stairs in search of her—her heart might be breaking at the top of them, but he would hesitate and dawdle at their foot.

Berry did not move as the heavy steps approached her, but when she got a friendly nudge in the ribs, she turned to get a good whiff of Irish stew breathed into her face.

"Beg your pardon, mum, but I thought you was asleep! There's a party down-stairs—the one that brings you them lots of flowers—but he's forgot to bring any today."

For a moment or so, Frowzibella thought Mrs. Booth had not heard, and she was about to begin again, when Berry said:

"I will come directly," and she listened to the heavy steps as they clumped themselves out of hearing.

Then, without even a touch to her hair, with her painter's blouse still on her, and smudges of paint on her hands and cheek, she went swiftly down-stairs and into the presence of Hugo Holt.

CHAPTER XVI

Fais ce que voudras
Advienne que pourra.

PERHAPS no finer instance of his tact could be shown than in the fact that Mr. Holt came empty-handed. The room was bare of flowers, but he had brought none. The candles were lit. He could see the traces of tears on her cheeks as she stood just inside the door that she had shut behind her.

If ever in his brilliant, many-sided life he felt remorse, he might have felt it then, as, going nearer to her, he saw the frightful alteration that a week had made in her face.

She looked up at him, not speaking, but, ah! where was her anger now? All was forgotten in the overmastering, stupendous joy that his presence brought her. Here was love, pure love, that will not recognize a fault in what it loves, that is blind and deaf and dumb to everything save this bodily sense that its beloved is within reach of its hand.

"Forgive me," he said, seeing only her pallor and stricken look. "I was mad—only forgive me."

She looked at him for a moment, trembling on the verge of wild tears. Oh! to sob them out on his shoulder, to hide herself in the shadow of his strength, to be the humblest thing to him, lest he should go away and leave her forever!

"Are you sorry?" she said, snatching her voice between the love and the scorn that racked her; "or are you proud of adding the last insult, the last straw, to the lot of a woman who is down in the world, and who has no one to defend her?"

He answered her nothing.

"It is always the way," she went on in her low passion-

ate voice. "If a woman forgets herself, ever so little, the man punishes her with the whole might of his insolent cruelty. I thought you meant to be kind to me—and I have thanked you very often—and all the while you were thinking of me as one of those other women to whom you are accustomed."

"I am sorry," he said, doggedly. "Will you forgive me?"

If she had known then what issues trembled in the balance she would have cried out "No!" but as it was, with her new-born strength stirring, and with the enemy vanquished, sad-looking before her, her heart inclined to mercy, and involuntarily, though timidly, she put out her hand.

As he took it a shock ran through her, and she turned white as snow.

"You will be good?" she said, with trembling lips.

"Yes."

"And you will never—never kiss me again?"

He was silent.

Does a true woman ever make terms with the man she loves? When he humbles himself to her, does she not forgive him, and by her trust leave more to his honor than if she exacted his bond?

"I am going away soon," said Berry, rather irrelevantly, as she took her hand away; "but until then—can we not be friends?"

Perhaps he did not answer her, or she did not listen, as she sat down and took up her work again at the very stitch where she had stopped a week ago.

"You have been painting to-day?" he said.

"Yes."

"You promised me once that you would let me see you at work."

"And so you may," she said, as indifferently as if he had bred no fear in her; "but not to-day—it is too late."

"Do you go out of town soon?" he said.

"In about a week—to Ladisloes."

"You are very fond of Mrs. Cholmondely," he said.

"She is my dearest friend. But she will not be there; she is at Madeira with her children, and Mr. Cholmondely has gone abroad for three months."

"Then why do you go?" he said.

She lifted the head that was set so beautifully on her long, slender throat, and said:

"I want change."

"The Essex flats are unhealthy—especially at this time of year," he said; "you will do better to remain in town."

"Are you afraid that I shall send for you?" she said bitterly; "pray do not alarm yourself! A thousand leagues are nothing to travel for a woman who is out of your reach—but a mile is crawled slowly when you know that you will find her at the mile's end."

"I would crawl every step of the way," he said quietly, "if I were sure of finding you at the mile's end."

"No," she said, "you would not find me there," and went on working as if he did not exist.

But she looked up presently to see that he looked tired and downcast, like a man who has had a heavy day, and is disappointed of his rest at the end of it.

All the anger in her died out, as the woman softened.

"You are tired," she said anxiously. "Have you had a very long day?"

"It is not over yet," he said wearily; "I have two or three hours of work before dinner. But I want to hear about your plans," he added, with the unfailing reticence concerning self that always distinguished him.

"And I want to hear about *you*," she said; "but first of all, tell me, how is your little girl?"

He brightened perceptibly, and to herself she said, quoting Hetty's words, "Home ties are strongest."

"She is very well. Some day, perhaps, you will let me bring her to see you."

"And your tall boys," said Berry, slowly. "I should like to see them too. Are they a help to you? are they following in your steps?"

"Children are a nuisance," he said abruptly, as he got up, and her heart sunk as she saw that he was about to go.

"I shall come and see you on Thursday," he said, naming the next day but one, "and perhaps you will let me go and see you at Ladisloes."

"It is too far," she said, "and you have not time."

"I would go there, or to the world's end, to see you," he said quietly.

Then he kissed her little hand, all smudged as it was and stained with paint, and she shivered as he did it, remembering all the shame and the outrage of that other kiss a week ago.

But when he had gone she stood looking down on her hand, then slowly lifted it to her lips.

"Oh!" she cried passionately, exultantly even, "I love you now! I love you now!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"Bite hard, lest remembrance come after,
And press with new lips where you pressed."

EDGAR BOOTH had of late developed an odd tetchiness of disposition, and was wont to display an unexpected anger at any invasion of his privacy. He did not share his letters with his wife as formerly, and she observed that each night he folded his waistcoat up, and placed it under his pillow, so that she knew there was something in it which he wished to hide.

Many a time she might have removed it, and read its

contents, but she was too proud; moreover, her own sense of wrong-doing against him was too keen to suffer her to criticise any *lèse majesté* toward herself.

He had given consent to their visit to Ladisloes, not to please her, but because certain rare old manuscripts in the library were, as he thought, essential to his work, and he knew that he could journey up and down comfortably to his book-centers, and of course he left his wife out of his calculations—as usual.

When Hugo Holt next called, he found no tears, no holland blouse, no smudges of paint, but a perfectly appointed, bitter-tongued woman of the world ready to receive him.

Perhaps the knowledge that he loved her restored the balance of power: it is well for the world that no two lovers love with equal passion at one and the same time! And of course she thought, as a woman always does think, that she could manage to control the passions she had brought into play, and watch them flow peacefully on forever. I wonder if Circe's swine ever turned upon and rent her? It is in the ignorance of the hand that leads, rather than its skill, that safety depends.

Probably every woman can support herself becomingly when she is being made love to, but it is another thing to keep a lover at arm's length, and yet agreeably amuse him.

But if Berry found herself in such a difficulty, she gave no sign of it, as she laughed and talked brilliantly; but his keen eye noted a subtle change in her—a change that he had himself produced—and this was a curious *hardening* of her face and manner, and even a touch of recklessness in her words and voice. She felt ashamed, dishonored; something had gone from her that could never come back, and she likened herself to a mirror, over which some blighting breath has been breathed, and is not suffered ever to pass away. In this bitter mood she managed to say more

than one thing that hurt him, and at last he said quietly: "You do manage to say the unkindest things."

"Are you used to nothing but compliments from my sex?" she said, looking at him scornfully; "are *all* the women in love with you who go to see you?"

"You can be the sourest, as you can be the sweetest woman in the world," was all the answer he made her.

"But of course you can do what you please," she went on; "for you are so respectable—and you would be a miserable man without your respectability! You have a horror of scandals, you have never been talked about, your domestic *ménage* is a model of propriety, and your name has never been unlawfully linked with any woman's—though you are nearly forty-six years old."

"Nearly old enough to be your father," he said coolly.

"Yes," she said, her brilliant, scornful eyes seeming to flash something even stronger than dislike as she looked at him, "you Scotch are all alike; you are very cautious, very clever, very pious, very immoral; and if, nowadays, you drink less than other men, it only makes you all the more dangerous."

"I am glad that you do not regard us as entirely harmless," he said, negligently; but he knew that she was speaking truth, though of the hard side of his nature she had only a faint idea.

"You would not be happy in exile or in disgrace," she said; "you would not suffer the greatest passion of your life to jeopardize for one moment your position in the world, and you have sufficient strength of mind to subordinate everything to your one object in life—success."

"You dissect me very mercilessly," he said, with that slight indrawing of the lips that she knew so well.

"I have been studying you," she said, with a laugh that had little mirth in it; and then she got up, trying to quell the species of rage that had seized her suddenly as she looked at him sitting there, and knew what his errand

was, and how in his soul he had made up his mind to succeed.

He did not ask her to sacrifice anything for him—men do not ask such things nowadays—not to go away with him, only to love him, to be to him what his own wife should have been—to be a silent dishonor to her husband, unsuspected by either him or the world, and outwardly as pure as in the hour when he first met her. She made a gesture as if she flung some loathsome thing from her, then for a moment she looked at his sleek horses, his ponderous coachman, and she muttered aloud the word "Respectable!" as she went back to her place.

"You promised me once that I should see you at work," said Mr. Holt; "will you let me see you to-day?"

"Why did you do it?" she cried, looking at him with lovely, cold eyes, and as if she had not heard him speak. "Why did you undo it all—all the self-control and the gentleness you had shown from the beginning? It was for your reticence and your strength, your audacity and your courage, that I loved you—you seemed to have in you every quality that I most admire in man, and you have spoiled it all—and I have lost my friend and you have gained—nothing."

"You will change," he said, with stubborn lips set hard. "And so you will not let me see you work to-day?"

Her arms fell to her sides, a feeling of powerlessness against this man's iron will for a moment palsied her; then her spirit returned, she lifted her head, and scorning to show fear of him, she said: "You can come up to my attic if you please," and moved out of the room, and ran lightly up the stairs before him.

She heard him following her up those many steps, but her breath was gone, when she reached the door and pushed it open.

The room was bare and plain; no rich stuffs, no books or properties, nothing to assist the imagination was there,

only an easel, upon which one picture stood, and the bare necessaries of her craft.

He gave one quick look round, then came up to her as she took up her palette and brush, and prepared to paint.

"You have nothing to help you," he said, and the pain in his voice made it sound bitter; "you are handicapped in every way."

"Yes," she said; "I have never had a chance."

Ignorantly, accidentally even, people said Berry had made a hit before she was twenty-one years old. She had begun very early in life to paint, and her first exhibited picture, though full of crudities and mistakes, had touched the public heart; she had made it laugh, and she had made it cry. Thenceforth, the more the critics abused her, the more the public loved her, and so she had become famous by the royal right it conferred; and no emperor could have been prouder of his finest victories than was she of the honor that had been bestowed by the masses upon her.

"Have you killed him?" said Mr. Holt, with something strange in his voice as he stood looking at the picture.

"I don't know. I am not sure if he be only dead—or asleep."

He drew a deep breath, went back to the door, and shut it.

PART II.

"Tout connaître, c'est tout pardonner."

CHAPTER I.

AT THE GATES OF DEATH.

A WOMAN was being tried for the murder of her husband, and defended by the man for whom she had committed the crime. The prisoner was Beryl Booth, the man was Hugo Holt. To herself she seemed to have reached her highest point of shamelessness and infamy, when in open court she looked across at him, and pleaded "Not guilty" of the murder to which she had confessed in every detail a fortnight ago.

To outsiders there seemed nothing strange in so celebrated a woman being defended by so eminent a man, and as no breath of scandal had ever associated their names, the inner horror of the situation was partly visible to only one or two persons in court, and in its entirety only to one.

Even the look exchanged by the woman and her defender, when she was called upon to plead, passed unnoticed. Yet what a look was there! what woe and determination, what memories, and what a future of no hope, mingled in their glance, when, by mere force of will, he compelled her to add perjury to her other scarlet sins! And the line of defense that it was rumored he intended to adopt was, in the face of the evidence, and the woman's bodily presence, more flagrantly lying still.

Mad! Look at her as she stands in the dwindled sunshine of a London criminal court, reason enthroned upon

her low, wide brow, judgment firm on her lips, while through the downcast lids you seem to see the sweetness of the eyes that refuse to shed the tears that weight them, and you will say, "There, to all appearance, is a woman at once strong and tender, spirited yet gentle, adorable and good." Yet a man might as well take a devil to his fireside—nay, a devil would show more ruth in his crime than she.

Of Hugo Holt it might have been possible to imagine that he would sweep from his path whatever came in his way, but in *her* face there was a failure of hardness—an almost excess of softness—you might imagine her to sin through stress of pity, or of love, but from deliberate will and determination to do wrong—never.

Yet in cold blood she had committed a murder so piteous, so horrible in its circumstances, as to ring from one end of the world to the other, and arouse so much public attention, that every foot of ground in the court was thronged when, early in March, she was brought up for trial.

It had been a brutal, a stupid, and a cowardly crime; one worse than that (said the world), for it was so useless! If she had only had a little patience, if she had only waited, her husband would have died of his own accord, but her hurry was too great, and so she must reap the gallows.

He had died, her poor murdered man, loving her, believing in her to the last; it had been upon her breast that he gasped out his death agony, to her hand that he had clung when the everlasting darkness had hidden her from his eyes.

That he was far gone in an incurable complaint she had not known until after his death, when an autopsy was performed upon him; but it was said, that when they told her, she made no sign, only said, as she had from the beginning, "I am guilty—let me die!"

To some of the lookers-on, worn-out habitués of old sensations, it seemed that there must be a novelty, an *élan* in the feeling of a woman who could not only be so passionately loved by the man whom she had undone, but, with the stain of blood freshly on her hand, could command the open countenance and advocacy of such a man as Hugo Holt.

One or two people shrugged their shoulders and said he and she had probably been lovers, and, with the characteristic daring that occasionally distinguished him, he loved her the better for a crime that she thought would bring her nearer to himself.

But both had probably left out of their calculations Mrs. Holt, who, good, excellent woman, had no intention whatever of departing her pleasant life to oblige her husband, and was blissfully ignorant that he played any part toward Mrs. Booth save that of her advocate. She thought it quite natural that a woman who had gone down in the world should commit a murder, and equally natural that the most famous criminal pleader of the day should be called upon to defend her.

Beryl wore no mourning—why should she affect to mourn the life that she had taken? She had on the white serge gown in which Hetty had last seen her at Brook Street, with bands of dark fur at the throat and wrists, and a small, close white bonnet, also edged with fur. She looked very young, and curiously innocent, and, save when she looked at Hugo Holt, had not once lifted her eyes since she was placed in the dock. Her face expressed no fear, but rather the intense weariness of a child who is made to stand up for a long and difficult punishment, and who longs for the moment when she can forget fatigue and punishment alike in slumber. It was a face to haunt a man's memory with its sweetness and its sorrow; so might a saint, serene in her holy faith, look under the dulled agony of a long martyrdom.

She neither stirred nor looked up, when the counsel for the prosecution rose, nor did she at any time throughout his speech manifest any emotion. That speech was brief and to the point; he had to deal with facts, not hypothesis, and his task was simple.

"Early in January," he said, "Mr. and Mrs. Booth were residing at Ladisloes, in Essex, in the absence of the master and mistress of the house, who were then both abroad. Evidence would be brought forward to show that Mr. Booth appeared to have fallen at this time into a weak state of health, and this weakness seemed to increase upon him, though Mrs. Booth did not apparently observe it, and was never heard to make any remark upon the subject. He was a very learned man, and spent the greater part of his time over his books, while Mrs. Booth, when not painting, was constantly wandering about the grounds. There was reason to believe that she was not always unaccompanied in these walks, and the evidence of a gardener would go far toward establishing a motive for what was at first sight only a stupid, senseless crime, and that motive was, a profound and reckless passion for a man who was not her husband.

"This person came and went with the strictest privacy, and even the gardener could not have sworn to his personality, though he overheard a conversation between them about the middle of January. With the end of the month matters within-doors changed for the worse, and Mr. Booth's illness refused to be any longer ignored. He twice or thrice went to London, to consult his medical man, and even a doctor visited him, but he still kept to his usual habits of life, and would sit among his books in his dressing-gown, seemingly quite contented if his wife were somewhere near him. It was remarked in these last days of his life that the bond between the two seemed closer and more tender than formerly, and the quiet attitude of devotion that he had always shown her was in-

tensified to a fondness that would hardly suffer her out of his sight. That at this time she was suffering under great stress of mind was proved by the servants, who would hear her pacing her room for hours together during the night, and often low moans, as of a person in extremest agony, would startle those who were passing her door. A great change became perceptible in her looks, she had the air of a woman haunted by some dreadful thought, or the memory of some dreadful deed. One morning she rose early, was driven to the station, three miles distant, and took the train for town, returning the same morning. Within four days of her returning Mr. Booth was dead. A servant, entering their room the last thing at night with some beef-tea, found Mr. Booth lying a corpse on the sofa, and his wife insensible in the arms that even in the agonies of death had folded about her.

"Tightly clutched in her stiffened hand was a small bottle marked 'Poison,' and empty. It bore the name and address of the chemist from which she had purchased it in London four days previously, and on the table beside her was the empty glass from which he had drunk. When they brought her to herself she cried out, 'Oh! I have murdered him!' and fell upon his body, and implored him to forgive her for having taken his life. When the doctor came she repeated her admissions, and had continued to do so until this morning, when it was fully expected that she would plead 'Guilty' to the charge against her. That she had not done so was due probably to some secret influence that had been brought to bear upon her, but its only effect would be to somewhat lengthen out the trial, which could have but one issue. A more cowardly and infamous murder had probably never been committed, and the fact that the prisoner was a woman well known for her great intellectual powers only made the crime the more heinous and unnatural. That the man who was her lover had probably inspired it, or at

least had caused her to resolve on removing Mr. Booth from her path, was only too likely, and, as an accomplice to the deed, it was earnestly to be hoped that he might be traced, and brought to justice. Whatever moral share, however, he might have in her guilt, the act was clearly committed by her hand; and, from the curious evidence of a picture painted by her some months ago, it would appear that the deed had been long premeditated, and even the plea of manslaughter could not be urged upon her behalf. The picture in question represented Mr. Booth lying dead in his bed, and looking, as the doctor would presently witness, exactly as he did after death, and the woman who was peeping in through the open door-way, with a devilish exultation in her deed, had been painted by Mrs. Booth in the likeness of herself. 'Deserted' was scrawled beneath the canvas—'Murdered' would have been a truer title." (The picture was produced, and handed up to the judge and jury. More than one man shuddered as he gazed, thinking of his own wife, and looked with unconquerable loathing at the woman in the dock.)

Mr. Hawksley concluded his speech by pointing out to the jury their plain duty to return a verdict of guilty, in accordance with the evidence about to be given, which in one unbroken chain forged the links of the prisoner's guilt.

In the moment after he had ceased to speak, and before the first witness for the prosecution was called, there was for a moment profound silence, suddenly broken by the singularly pure, distinct enunciation of a man who spoke from the body of the court.

"The last time I saw that woman she was playing hunt-the-slipper," he said, and was startled when she lifted her eyes and looked full at him; but even as she gazed, he and the scene around her faded, her awful situation was forgotten, and the stain of blood-guiltiness

had faded from her soul and hand—she was gay once more, she was innocent, she was happy—and as in a lightning flash she saw the jocund game, and herself the principal actor in it. The scene fades, the room is silent, she is once more in the dock, and Jemmy St. Asaph's voice is still ringing in her ears. She lifts her head, and her eyes wander round the court, but she sees one face only out of that upturned sea; it is the face of Hetty, pale and tear-stained, haggard and worn, looking, as indeed is the case, as if she had traveled night and day to be present in court this morning. Then for the first time her lips tremble, her head sinks, and two or three heavy tears roll slowly down her cheeks.

CHAPTER II.

"An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But, oh! more horrible than that,
Is the curse in a dead man's eye."

THE witnesses for the prosecution were now called, the first being the chemist from whom she purchased the poison.

He said that she was quite calm and collected when she asked for it, stating that she was an artist, and required it in the exercise of her art. She gave her full address, and references to two people residing in London. The dose was sufficient to kill three people, and as it was all administered at once, death would ensue almost immediately.

Cross-examined, he said that he thought she looked as if she had seen trouble, but had got resigned to it now. She seemed in no hurry, and waited patiently for some time till he could attend to her.

The next witness was the servant who had entered the

bedroom to find Mr. Booth dead, and Mrs. Booth insensible in his arms. The empty bottle of poison was clutched in her right hand, and though she tried to unlock her fingers, could not do so until prisoner got her senses back, when she cried out, "Oh! I have murdered him!" and the bottle fell out of her hand to the ground. Had always thought Mr. and Mrs. Booth on very good terms till she had heard some gossip from Howtyego in the servants' hall, and then they had all been on the lookout more or less, to see if any gentleman came on the sly to see her.

At these last words a look of terror suddenly overspread Berry's face, which had not changed under the evidence of her husband's death, and her own confession. To Hetty it seemed as if Berry longed to look at Hugo Holt, yet forced her eyes to keep away from him, but he did not glance toward her as he continued his cross-examination, but without inquiry into what Howtyego had said. He seemed to aim principally in shaking the woman's evidence that Mrs. Booth had made use of the words that she stated.

In this he failed, and the next witness, the doctor, who had been sent for as soon as Mr. Booth's death was discovered, entirely corroborated her story. Mr. Booth had been dead about half an hour when he arrived, the cause of death being prussic acid, taken in a very large quantity. Mrs. Booth was kneeling beside him, her head on his shoulder, when witness arrived, and she looked up and said, "Do not touch him, I murdered him. He is mine now." He thought then that her words pointed to jealousy of some other woman, and that she had murdered Mr. Booth for unfaithfulness to her. The police were not communicated with that night, the hour being so late, but very early next morning they were sent for, and he himself remained there all night.

Cross-examined as to why he had done so, he said, that he believed Mrs. Booth meant to commit suicide, and

that, in spite of her crime, he felt so much interest in, and pity for her, that he desired to save her from herself. So he had watched in the adjoining room all night. Asked if he had been awake the whole time, he admitted that he might have dozed off a little toward dawn.

Cross-examined as to whether Mrs. Booth had left her room that night, he was forced to confess that, having fallen asleep, he could not tell. The servants had all gone to bed when Mr. Booth had been laid out in the death-chamber, and no one was watching but himself. If she had wished to escape, she could have done so, but he found her asleep with her head resting on the dead man's hand when he went into the room next morning. At ten o'clock she had been removed to prison, and he had never seen her since, until to-day.

The next witness called was a famous surgeon from London, who had been summoned to perform an autopsy on Mr. Booth.

He said that the immediate cause of death was prussic acid, but that internal evidence showed that Mr. Booth was the victim of an incurable disease, which had been slowly gaining upon him for years, but had latterly made such rapid strides that he could not possibly have lived longer than a few months. He must have been aware of the disease, from the intense agony it cost him, and have known, too, that there was no cure for it, and that his sufferings at the last would be frightful. Witness had known men deliberately commit suicide rather than torture those they loved by letting them witness such unassuageable pangs, and but for the evidence Mrs. Booth had furnished against herself, he should have said that her husband had himself obtained, and administered the poison, and that from a merciful and humane point of view he would have done right.

"All the men are in her favor," said one of the female *fripons* present, with a sneer as the witness left the box;

"I shouldn't wonder if they make her out innocent after all!"

Howtyego was the next witness called, and a quick, sudden rustle of prurient curiosity ran round the court; here would be such evidence as great ladies love to gather from the region of scullions and kitchen-maids, when some one of their order figures in the divorce court.

On Berry's face was stamped the burning, bitter flush of shame. She felt herself like the debased respondent in some vulgar divorce case, upon whom her servants have spied, and made disgusting comments, and who have distorted, perhaps, her most innocent looks and words into material for guilt. A sudden sense of all the hopeless ruin to which she had brought herself seized her, and who but would have envied her a few short months ago? She had been proud, she would not humble herself to God, and so He had taken everything—and was even about to take her life. It is a fearful thing to know that *all* is lost; we may know ourselves in jeopardy, but we always think there is a chance of redemption, that we shall pass the harbor-bar at last; it is only when we come face to face with *Finis*, written on the last page of the book of life, we turn to the world, that we know our doom is irrevocable as death itself.

The man Howtyego was a rather sullen, reserved-looking man, whose evidence had even a greater weight, from the absence of interest and animus with which he gave it.

He said that Mrs. Booth had been in the habit of walking a great deal ever since she came to Ladisloes in December. Didn't seem to care much where she went, or how often she went over the same track, so long as she was on her feet, and often she passed him with her eyes fixed-like, as if she were asleep. One afternoon early in February he went into the grape-houses when it was almost dark. There was an entrance at either end, and when about half-way through the houses, he

heard in the one beyond, a sound like a woman weeping, and then a man's voice, and as there was a deal of burgling about just then, he thought he would listen, in case one of the women in the house had got a lover, as like as not from Whitechapel.

He hadn't listened long before he knew it was a lady—Mrs. Booth—and it was a gentleman with a very quiet voice who was talking to her. She seemed to be struggling against him, and he heard her say, "I would kill myself afterward—or you." And then she said, "Some day I shall tell him, and murder will come of it—either you or him." He could not swear exactly to whether she said, "It will be you or him."

It was too dark to see either of them, but he thought he should know the gentleman again by his voice. (Here Hetty felt an insane desire to leap up, and, pointing her finger at Hugo Holt, shriek out, "Thou art the man!" and upon Berry's face the look of horror grew, and her very breath seemed to suspend itself, as she listened for the witness's next words.) He heard little more, because he thought they were approaching him, so he slipped away and watched by the entrance till they should come out. He waited half an hour, but when he opened the door boldly, and went in, the place was empty; they must have gone out at the opposite end. He didn't think much about it at the time, but afterward, when Mr. Booth was murdered, he thought this man, whoever he was, might have put the idea into Mrs. Booth's head that day.

Mr. Holt did not cross-examine this witness, for what reason probably only two persons in court knew. The gardener left the court immediately, with manifest joy at his escape.

This closed the case for the prosecution, and the court then adjourned for luncheon. On its return, Hugo Holt's speech would be delivered for the defense.

CHAPTER III.

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone;
For this brave old earth must borrow its mirth;
It has troubles enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh—it is lost in the air;
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care."

SAID one *fripon* to another, as the court emptied of all but mere spectators,

"Who was the man?"

"Holt himself, very likely."

"Not he! He would have driven down openly. When he courts, it is respectably—with his carriage and pair waiting outside."

"But she used to go and see him often at Lely Place, you know. One of the clerks told me so, and how he contrived always to be alone with her for a few minutes. But, on the other hand, he told me that she always blushed when she saw Holt. Now a woman may blush before she goes wrong, but never after."

"She doesn't give one the idea of a woman who has gone wrong. They say she didn't know till last night that any one was to defend her, and that Holt only wrung from her the promise to plead 'Not guilty' *when* she was physically worn out by his insistence."

"It won't help her much. Wonder what line he means to take? Insanity won't wash—manslaughter would be safest."

"After all, she didn't do much harm. She only hurried the poor devil up a bit, and no doubt, if all the

doctors say is true, he was very much obliged to her. A pity that women are so confoundedly impatient!"

And they consoled themselves with sherry and sandwiches. Very few persons had left their seats, which would have been instantly filled up, for the event of the day would be Hugo Holt's speech, and many bets were given and taken as to the line of defense he meant to adopt.

"He can go to luncheon," said a lady who sat, somewhat isolated from the rest at the back of the court; he can eat and drink, while *she*—"

A storm of passionate tears choked her utterance; behind her thick veil she cried for awhile, helplessly, then she said,

"He is a devil, a fiend—and I wish that his food may *choke* him!"

The young man in barrister's wig and gown, who sat beside her, listened with a perplexed, but cogitative look in his blue eyes. He knew the devoted attachment that subsisted between Mrs. Cholmondely and the woman who had just left the dock; he had got his own opinions about Hugo Holt's feeling toward Mrs. Booth, and her attitude toward him, but the shrewd, brilliant-eyed, clever young man could not take the same leap from hypothesis to certainty that Hetty had cleared at a bound.

Granted that Berry had got strongly under Hugo Holt's influence, she was yet a woman of determined will, and had struggled successfully against him, as witnessed by the fact that, through fear of herself, she had left her house in his (Poore's) company on an inclement day, rather than meet the man whom she admired.

"What can be his influence over her?" cried Hetty, almost beside herself with grief, fatigue, and fasting, and remembering only that this safe, steady young man had become an intimate friend during that happy, bright Christmas at Ladisloes—"a plain, dark, satur-

nine man, who cares for nothing but money and success, and who will step over her dishonored grave without a pang. Oh! it is impossible that she should alter so—in so short a time. Was ever the course of guilt so quick, so frightfully quick as this? Only a few months ago she was a girl, laughing and playing, as frolicsome, as pure of heart as one of my children, and do you mean to say that she could run the whole scale of crime with such fearful rapidity? Oh! you did not know her—the gentlest, the sweetest, the most humane soul, I used always to think that verse applied to her so exactly,

"'He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small'——

for she loved everything; she was good to everybody, the weak and the poor especially, and her life was one perpetual forgetting of self."

Llewellyn Poore nodded slowly, his dark brows meeting almost in a line across his forehead.

"Was she at all passionate in anger?"

"Yes—but very rarely."

"Then Holt will do best to plead the crime as one of manslaughter only."

"You think that she *did* it?" cried Hetty, recoiling from him in horror.

"Undoubtedly. But I believe she was practically insane at the time."

"Or under the influence of another will. He had always that influence over her—it must be what men call *das Dämonische;* nothing else could account for his overthrowing, in so short a time, a woman at once so pure and so proud, with such will and strength of character as Beryl Booth."

"He would not be likely to counsel her to such a crime," said Llewellyn Poore; "anything so clumsy and useless would not be in his line."

"You have a bad opinion of him," said Hetty, swiftly, and putting her hand on his; "now promise me this—help me to find out the truth about this business, and between us we will save her."

He shook his head.

"She will be condemned," he said, "the verdict is a foregone conclusion. The utmost we could do would be to make out extenuating circumstances, and memorialize the Home Secretary, for I am much mistaken if the jury recommend her to mercy."

Hetty withdrew her hand, groaning. Her sweet, pretty face was all disfigured with tears and dust, her fair hair was all pushed back in disorder from her brow. It was at Nice that she heard of Mr. Booth's murder and Berry's arrest, and without waiting for her husband, whom she had gone to meet, she had set off for England without even a change of clothes, or closing her eyes on the way, At the very door of the court she had met Llewellyn Poore, who had squeezed in with her, and actually obtained for her a seat.

"There is something behind it all," she said; "no matter how appearances are against her, she is not guilty. Can you look in her face, and believe it? But all the same she is resolved to die—perhaps for some fault against her husband that she has exaggerated into a crime—perhaps because she would rather die than suffer Hugo Holt's influence any longer."

"You are prejudiced against him," said Llewellyn Poore, slowly; "he bears an unblemished character as a man of honor, and is known to be a kind husband, a devoted father, and a stanch friend to those whom he likes; that he can hate his enemies as heartily as they hate him, and show it, too, is only another point in his favor."

"Yes," said Hetty, bitterly, "his influence seems only to be malign, sinister, where my little Berry is concerned.

But don't forget that she set herself up against his will, and he is a man who never permits his will to be crossed without punishment. I knew that she saw him several times in town late last year, and, though she said little, yet I could read, between the lines of her letters, the fearful conflict that was going on in her mind. Then she went to Ladisloes, and wrote to me regularly, but all struggle in her seemed to be over; a dead level of peace, or, rather, depression, had been reached, in which the *active* faculty of pain seemed to be in abeyance. If she did not appear to attach much importance to Mr. Booth's increasing weakness, I think it was because she was firmly convinced in her mind that she would shortly die herself, and so, for the time, her attention was more morbidly fixed on her own health than on his. But why am I telling you all this? I am betraying her confidence, and, of course, you can't understand—you do not know and love her, as I do!"

And Hetty laid her head on the back of the bench before her, and wept.

The young man was silent. To his legal brain the affair was a psychological problem with which he longed to grapple, but he must have time in which to think it out, and his nature was too thorough to attempt to give Mrs. Cholmondely comfort at the expense of truth.

"I know what people say," went on Hetty, dabbing her eyes through her veil, and leaving little black smudges everywhere, "that she could not support her altered circumstances, and that the loss of her house, of society, of everything to which she was used, drove her into a low state of depression, in which it became a toss-up whether she took her own life or Mr. Booth's. But it was not so; she had too much strength of mind to break her heart for a few tables and chairs, and a lot of luncheons and dinners. It is *that man*"—and Hetty shook her little fist at Mr. Holt's vacant place—"who has ruined her."

"But it was not to his advantage to do so," said Llewellyn Poore, "and his appearing on her behalf to-day, when he knows that the verdict is a foregone conclusion, is distinctly in his favor as an honorable man, and a man of courage."

"He can be as daring as he is unscrupulous," said Hetty, with bitter scorn; "a man must be pretty sure of his position before he can do the things that Hugo Holt does with impunity; of course he loves her in his selfish way, but remember this, that, save myself—and you, to whom I am revealing everything—not a soul is aware that there has ever been anything between them. But can't you see," she went on, restlessly, "how unlikely it was, that, knowing her husband to be dying, she should have deliberately killed him?"

"But *did* she know it?" said Mr. Poore, looking earnestly at Hetty. "To you, as her dearest friend, she would naturally write such dreadful news about her husband at once."

"She—she did not," said Hetty falteringly; "but he had a hatred of illness, or of any one supposing that he was ill. But in her last letter to me, she said that he was anxious to return to town, and that they would leave in a few days. The next news I got of them was the awful news I got at Nice."

"Her last letter was written *after* the date fixed by Howtyego for the interview he partly overheard?"

"Yes."

"Then clearly she felt herself safer in town than at Ladisloes, and probably the murder was undetermined on when she wrote to you. Therefore the theory of the picture fails."

"The picture!" cried Hetty in strong disdain; "you have seen him, you know what Mr. Booth was—a sort of sarcophagus set up on end, and never fit to be seen unless she had brushed and pulled him into shape—a perpetual

worry and blister to her, and so intensely selfish that he never even argued about it—he was born so, and couldn't help it! Her bright spirit chafed perpetually against the dull one to which she was chained, and into which she could not strike a spark of life; but she was so loyal that she would never admit it. And her life for eight years has been a complete sacrifice to his. Most women would have left him, but Berry—"

Hetty's voice ended in a faint sob that told of inanition as well as grief, and Llewellyn Poore, touched with compunction, sprung up.

"You have had no luncheon," he said, and then she was alone for a little while, in which her thoughts flew now to Hugo Holt, cold and indifferent as he stood the legal chaff of his brethren on his espousal of a lost cause, and again to Berry, who, somewhere out of sight, possibly ate and drank of a different wine and bread from his.

But when Mr. Poore returned it was to bring her something better than food, for a whisper had gone forth that Mr. Holt's defense would be something entirely original and altogether different from what had been expected, and that he had as good as staked his reputation on the prisoner's leaving the court a free woman.

CHAPTER IV.

"In all seemed guilt, remorse, or woe,
My own and others still the same,
Life-stifling fear, soul stifling-shame."

When Hugo Holt rose to address the jury for the defense, the question, Murder, or Manslaughter? seemed to shape itself on the air. If he could persuade these men that she committed the deed in a moment of passion, there might be a chance yet for her life—or such a mockery of life as Justice permits when she spares it.

Probably the moment was an unique one, even in the varied history of a Hugo Holt. For here was a man rising to defend a woman whom he knew to be guilty of a crime, directly or indirectly caused by himself, and from the consequences of which (far from blaming her) he meant to save her, if it were within the power of man that she should be saved. That he was saving her for himself, because he loved her with a passion that nothing on earth could break, and no infamy of hers make less, was known only to two persons in court, the woman in the dock, and the woman by the side of Llewellyn Poore.

But would she suffer herself to be saved? That was the question he asked himself, as for a brief moment the eyes of defender and defended met, and blindly ignorant as she was of what line he meant to adopt, her lips seemed to say—

"When you have spoken, I too will speak—and I will speak the truth."

Never, however, had Mr. Holt made a dryer, or less ornate speech. He wasted no time in self-commiseration for the difficult task imposed upon him, or in a maudlin appeal to the jury, but said plainly that the case ought never to have come into court for trial at all, for that it was one for a coroner's inquest only. Mr. Booth was a man of studious and sedentary pursuits, which probably paved the way for the mortal disease with which he was at last afflicted, and had probably been aware of, for some time before he told his wife of his danger. He was a man who had a morbid and excessive horror of pain, and been known to argue boldly that when a disease had become incurable, and must entail frightful agony on the sufferer, and those who loved him, that it was no crime to take the life that could only linger out to a miserable close. When, therefore, he found his tortures unbearable, he resolved to end them, and being unable to leave the house, he sent his wife to London for the poison, and, four days

later, deliberately took it. How natural for her to exclaim, "I have murdered him!" when she found him slain by the instrument that she herself had placed in his hand. How impossible for a tender-hearted woman to realize that he was better so, and that all her love and care could never have given him the release from agony that she had brought him! That his act was a cowardly, a selfish one, could not be denied, but he had probably never given a thought to the possibility of his wife being accused of his murder.

Here Berry, who had seemed to pass from a state of death to a living thing of fear and horror, cried out with blazing eyes:

"He is pleading to a lie! My husband never asked me to buy it—he was no coward, to die and leave his wife to be punished for his sin!"

But even as the last words were spoken, unconsciousness spread its veil over her face, she sunk forward with her head upon the rail; and Hugo Holt went on speaking as if she were not present.

"How great was the love that subsisted between husband and wife, unexpected proof had just been given; she could not bear even the smallest slur to rest on his memory, and as she had sacrificed herself during his life-time to his pursuits, so she now deliberately sacrificed her life, rather than accuse him of the crime of self-murder. One could imagine the long and fearful struggle that went forward in her mind before she could bring herself to do his bidding, and how, overcome at last by the sight of his suffering, she obeyed him, but with the noble resolve that though she gave him release, it should be at the cost of her own life. As to the evidence of the picture, that might be dismissed as altogether absurd. Artists and novel-writers of necessity drew largely on their imaginative powers, though they often introduced faces and shapes familiar to them, and the picture was a fancy one only,

and painted long before Mrs. Booth had any idea of her husband's desperate state of health. When she became aware of it—as she did many weeks before his suicide—was it in the least likely that she should resolve on imperiling her life by a crime that she knew to be absolutely useless and unnecessary? He could bring, if he wished it, a thousand witnesses to the gentle, sweet, humane character she bore, but he would call none, and preferred to point to the best and most speaking witness in her favor—her own face."

Mr. Holt lifted his hand as he spoke, and every eye was turned upon Berry, who had raised herself, and stood trembling but erect before the court.

"As to the evidence of the man Howtyego, it was altogether unworthy of credence. He could swear only to two voices, that might have belonged to any woman or man in the house or neighborhood. Ladislces was a vast place, and persons had repeatedly been found wandering about the grounds; and in the absence of its master and mistress it was highly probable that it should be used for clandestine intrigues. That the two whom Howtyego overheard did not belong to the house, seemed proved by the fact that they left the grapery by the exit that gave on to the park, and to a tract of walks and avenues beyond, commonly used by the surrounding villagers, and known as the 'Lovers' Walk.'

"Lastly, he submitted that there was not a tittle or scrap of evidence that could convict her of murder, and that even of moral guilt in obeying her husband's commands, she was, in the face of his incurable disease, innocent. And finally, he called upon the jury to acquit this much-tried and gentle woman of a crime that the whole history of her blameless and noble life declared to be impossible."

As he ceased to speak, a low murmur of astonishment, of admiration at his daring, spread through the air; but

it was checked as Berry, moving both hands forward as if in entreaty, opened her lips to address the Court.

It said something for Hugo Holt's courage and self-control, that in the very moment when name, honor, home, position, and reputation trembled in the balance, he sought neither by look or word to avert what was coming, but stood silently awaiting her speech.

"Gentlemen," she said, and oh! how sweet and young her voice sounded, and how sweet was the pale face that she lifted!—"my kind friend has pleaded for me according to the best of his belief, but in ignorance; he has pleaded what is not true. I bought the poison deliberately, and without my husband's knowledge, and I meant to take a human life with it. And the evidence of Howtyego"—she paused and pressed her hand against her heart—"is true. I was the woman, and my sin is doubly great. And I thank you for the mercy that may have been in your hearts toward me; but now all I pray of you is, that you will condemn me quickly, that soon my death may in part expiate my sins."

CHAPTER V.

"A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief
In word, or sigh, or tear."

ALL was over now, the excitement, the hubbub, the relentings of twelve honest men, and the verdict of "Guilty" had been returned.

Then, and then only, Berry looked at her defender. No guilty woman could have gazed so—it was the look of a poor woman who loves, but who has renounced her love; of one who has endured, who has suffered all for its sake, yet in its very cessation permits it to surmount and beat

down all—as if, having reached its highest point of suffering and expression, it must speak, and would, in the face of death. So might Saint Agnes have looked when she said:

"The furnace grows cold about me, the flame is divided asunder, and its heat is rolled back on them that quickened it."

His look to her expressed nothing, and, indeed, he apparently accepted the situation with his usual coolness and *aplomb*. He had tried to save her, and she would not be saved; but that, having made a fool of him, she should cast a look of adoring gratitude on him was quite in the ordinary way of a woman—or so thought the crowd, who had looked agape at the unexpected *dénouement*.

The prisoner had disappeared, the judge had vanished, soon the court was nearly empty, save for a woman, who wept with her head on a bench before her, and a young barrister, who sat beside her.

"Can I see her?" she said presently, and, after a long while, a time that seemed interminable, and after surmounting endless difficulties, Hetty found herself on the way to Berry's cell.

She shuddered at all these precautions to shut in a poor little trembling criminal! But when she found Berry, it was to find her fast asleep. She looked like a child who had sunk into a long, long rest, forgetful of the God in whose presence she would shortly have to appear, answering to the commandments that she had broken.

Hetty endured the silence so long as she was able; then she put her arms round the sleeping figure and cried, "Berry, Berry!" in a voice of anguish that woke her. Berry stirred, with no movement of horror or fear, and a smile was on her face as her eyes opened, and she recognized Hetty.

Then she tried to slip away, to escape out of her grasp, as if she were ashamed, and not worthy to be within it.

"Oh! my dear, my dear," cried Hetty, "I know it all—you are as pure and as good now as when we talked together at Ladisloes, and you got the poison because he bade you, and you are too loyal to own it."

"No," said Berry, as the happiness that sleep had brought her, faded out of her eyes, "I got it of my own accord—and I poured it out into a glass—and he drank it and died. I have been a wicked woman, and you need not pity me."

"There is something behind it all," said Hetty, slowly and stubbornly, "and I will find it out. You neither killed your husband, nor dishonored him."

A look of terror overspread Berry's features.

"Try to find out nothing," she said; "and if you ever loved me, let things be as they are. I hid something at Ladisloes," she went on swiftly, "on the night *he* died. Swear to me that, if you find it, you will destroy it unread."

"No," said Hetty, "I will not swear it. Whether it be a diary, or a confession, I will read it—and you shall be saved in spite of yourself."

"Saved!" cried Berry, almost fiercely, "and for what? My husband dead, and I left at the mercy of my heart, and the man who loves me? To die is easier, and less sinful. Don't try to hinder me," she said, laying her pale cheek against Hetty's, "I am so tired, and I shall be so glad for it all to be over. I did not know that he was going to plead for me till last night. I meant to say 'Guilty,' but he wrung, he forced from me the promise that I would not plead that. He would have done better to let me have my own will, for I only shamed him in open court to-day."

"I wish you had shamed him more," said Hetty, bitterly; "I wish you had said he was the man in the grape-house, and torn his mantle of respectability from his back."

"Do not blame him," said Berry, "it is always the

woman's fault—and the fault is mine. And now, good-bye, my dear, my dearest friend," she said, as the key turned in the lock, and announced another visitor.

"We shall meet again," said Hetty, as she clung for a moment to the tall, slender shape that bore itself so bravely; then, on the threshold as she went out, she met Hugo Holt coming in.

CHAPTER VI.

"And bring me word what thing it is
That women most desire."

SOCIETY was asking, "Who is the man?" for at least three days after the trial. Many women bore Berry a grudge, because she had dressed in such a way that no one would have suspected her of brains; because she had always attracted the best men to her wherever she appeared; and, lastly, because she had held herself supremely aloof from the mere shadow of a flirtation, displaying a certain insolence of virtue that had enraged the less immaculate of her acquaintance.

But nobody could discover the man. In public, she had never distinguished one more than another. Nor had she ever lit a bale-fire by which to warm her hearth, and her servants in Brook Street, and the landlady and the servant where she had lodged, could have not said a word to her discredit. At Ladisloes only the mystic love seemed to have sprung suddenly into life, to disappear as swiftly, leaving no trace behind.

"I always thought she was a deep little woman," said Jemmy St. Asaph, who felt himself an authority in the business, remembering how he had thumped her slipper on the floor one Christmas night, "and you know it's nearly always the dark horse that wins!"

Those persons who had pronounced her works immoral

because they directly appealed to the feelings, considered it a matter of no wonder that she had taken to murder—and worse—at last! But there were thousands who sincerely grieved for her, and would have saved her, if their piteous appeals to the Home Secretary could have done so; but out of her own mouth she was condemned, and with such circumstantial evidence to back it, no pardon was possible.

Mrs. Hugo Holt rarely reads the papers, and never those cases in which her husband was concerned. She reduced all his triumphs to certain net results of money, and was the double of Lady Scott, who, looking at her faded carpets, said, "Oh! I must get Sir Walter to write some of his nonsense books, and then I can buy new ones!"

Thus Mrs. Holt never thought of Berry's ruin, and certainly in no sense associated it with her husband. He behaved exactly as usual; was at her service to dine out with her occasionally, to take her to whimsical entertainments by chartered fools, and to first nights at a play, where his presence gave a *cachet* to the proceedings. But I think that when the music was sweetest, and the lights were brightest, when he looked round and saw not a woman in the company who could match her, he thought of Berry.

At Lely Place his manner showed no change. To some of his clients he was curt, to others courteous, but to all he gave his time without reserve, and his whole attention without stint. To some sarcastic, and some malicious comments on the *fiasco* of the Booth trial, he opposed a reserve of manner that ended in making people think that he knew a great deal more than he chose to say; and there were those who believed that he held some trump card that he meant to produce at last, and save her.

But these expectations dwindled as the month went by, and the day of Berry's execution rapidly approached. Gradually, too, as it became known that she had steadily refused to see Hugo Holt since the day she was con-

demned, all hope for her died away, and people blamed and pitied her according to their knowledge of her life, or their detestation of her crimes.

One afternoon in the New Law Courts, two men, moving rapidly in opposite directions, collided, and their knees knocked together. As they muttered apologies, they looked at each other, then the elder man accosted the younger.

"I met you at Ladisloes," he said, "and you were a great friend of Mrs. Booth."

"I had the honor of Mrs. Booth's acquaintance," said Mr. Llewellyn Poore; "I wish that I might claim the honor of being her friend."

"Why?'

"Because then I might persuade her to tell me the truth about her husband's death."

"What is the truth?"

"I think," said the young man deliberately, drawing his dark brows in a line across his blue eyes, "that she dreamed that she gave the poison to her husband, having bought it without any homicidal design. She told me once that she thought she had a dual existence, in which the one half of her did not know what the other half committed; and I believe that your hypothesis was right —that Booth found the poison at hand, and took it. For some reason" (and here the eyes of the two men met), "she did not wish to live, and preferred to escape life, though without the crime of self-murder; and I believe the evidence of it is at Ladisloes."

For a moment the man who was on the highest rung of the ladder looked at the young one who had with difficulty climbed a few steps of it.

"Thank you," he said, "you have given me a clew;" and he passed on.

CHAPTER VII.

"Though all the fierce and drunken passions wove
A dance more wild than e'er was maniac's dream;
Ye storms, that round the dawning east assembled,
The sun was rising though ye hid his light!"

WHEN Hetty had once crossed the threshold across which Mr. Booth's murdered body had been carried, and Berry had been led forth to prison, she wandered about the place ceaselessly like a ghost, who always seeks but never finds.

The day fixed for Berry's execution was very near, and she seemed in haste to meet it, with no fear whatever of the beyond to which she was hurrying. "Ned will be there," she said once, and those who heard her thought her mad or delirious; for how could she expect her victim to meet her gladly, to stretch out a gentle hand of welcome to her across the gulf she had dug between them?

The servants' evidence at Ladisloes was not in her favor. All agreed that though she did not neglect him, she seemed to be secretly afraid of him, and would watch him when he was not observing her; and more than once had been seen peeping in on him as he sat lost in study, as if she feared, yet longed, to approach him. But he was so preoccupied that he never seemed to notice her change of manner, but showed entire devotion to her always.

The evidence of Howtyego was not to be shaken, and other evidence was furnished that hinted at more frequent visits on the part of Mrs. Booth's unknown lover than had been suspected at the trial.

Hetty groaned in spirit at the light estimation in which the woman whom she had deemed the purest and brightest in the world was held; and she hated Hugo Holt more violently than ever.

One night a strange thing happened.

She had gone to bed, but could not sleep, and rising about dawn, crossed the corridor and went into the room where Mr. Booth had died. It was the same one that Berry and he had occupied at Christmas, and from which she had come one night in terror, imploring Hetty to save her from herself.

Had she been dreaming in her sleep of what was to come after?

And so now, Hetty, thinking of her friend and looking out through the window, and over the grass a little whitened with snow (although in March), and with the moon shining brightly over all, saw something glide through the gate-way, and so through it to the house door, and when arrived there, it halted, and looked up, saw her standing at the window above, her masses of yellow hair disheveled about her, her eyes fixed on him in a cold stare of dread and fear and wonder.

She never doubted that this was a supernatural visitant come to tell her of Berry's death, as slowly it raised a finger, and beckoned to her: she saw the eyes and the finger beckoning her as she passed down the staircase, as she unbarred the great door and flung it wide. The chill wind rushed up to meet her; blowing her night-dress about beneath the velvet cloak huddled above it.

"I have come to you to help me," a voice said; and then she knew that the visitor was Hugo Holt.

"Come in," she said curtly; and he followed her across the hall, and waited outside while she lit candles in the study; and then he came in, and sat down at a little distance from her.

"You love her," he said abruptly; "she told me once that there were no secrets between you. I managed to leave town to-night, my carriage broke down, and I have been detained nearly two hours on the road, I meant to ask your hospitality for a few hours for her sake. But

now, if you will answer me a few questions. I will withdraw from my unseemly intrusion on your rest."

Something worn, weary, in the dark face of the man, touched Hetty in spite of herself, and the hardness of her look lessened.

"You were her friend," he said; "she told you more than she told any one else in the world. Did she ever say one word to you throwing any light on the circumstances of Mr. Booth's death?"

Then Hetty's face hardened again. Was he not the cause of the tragedy? And he could dare to come here to question her about it.

"Did you not put the idea into her head?" she said, bitterly. "It is ill to ask how the slave has carried out the directions of his master!"

"It is she who has been master, I who have been slave throughout," he said, quietly. "Mrs. Booth has never been under my influence to the extent that I have been under hers. She is a pure, good, and true woman, whom I shall respect and love to the last beat of my heart."

"Yet you have spoiled her life, you have brought her to the gallows!" cried Hetty, wildly. "If you had only loved and respected her *less*, she might be a free and a happy woman now."

"I hope she may be a free and a happy woman yet," he said. "She has no sin with which to reproach herself, and that her husband killed himself is morally certain."

"How long have you been sure of that?" said Hetty, quickly.

"When I defended her," he said, slowly, "I believed her to be guilty, and the defense I set up was a purely imaginary one. But from words that she let drop, though she admitted nothing, on the occasion of my interview when I met you coming out of the cell, I am certain that on her behalf I was actually pleading the truth. But I could wring nothing from her. So, as a last resource, I

have come to you to-night, for I am convinced that she is hiding, or has hidden, some evidence concerning her husband's death, and that the evidence is to be found *here.*"

The light of the candle fell full on his dark Rembrandt-like face. Through the open door could be seen the silver gleams that fell from above on the oak staircase. A curious sense of unreality, of sleep-walking suddenly overcame Hetty, and at the same moment gave her the clew for which her mind had been groping during the past week.

"She walked in her sleep," she said, slowly. "She came to my door one night, and woke up, and found herself there, and she told me in her cell that she had hidden something here, and that if I found it I was to burn it unread, and I would not promise her. But I have looked everywhere," she added, sadly. "I can think of no new place in which to search."

"Whatever she hid *before* the night of his death would be of little value," said Mr. Holt, whose brows were bent together in intense thought. "Stay!" he added suddenly; "Is not this house said to be haunted?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Every one knows the reputation of Ladisloes, and on the night of Mr. Booth's death did either a ghost or something else appear abroad? In the evidence, the doctor who was supposed to be keeping watch over Mrs. Booth, said he would not swear that she had not left the death-chamber that night."

Hetty sat staring at Mr. Holt, her eyes grew fixed, unconsciously she put up one hand, and pushed her hair back as if to assist her struggle to remember something that had escaped her.

"The women said the ghost walked here that night," she said, in a hollow, strange voice; "and when before, they said it walked, and one of the women actually heard it speak, Berry was here—it may have been Berry herself, and she may have gone to the same room a second time,

drawn thither by a curious association of ideas. Let us go and see," she cried, starting up and seizing the candlestick, and was gone so quickly that his usually sedate footsteps had to hurry themselves after her flying ones.

Across the hall, up a winding staircase where glints of silver shone here and there on brass, or shield, or picture, he followed her until they emerged upon a square landing out of which rooms opened irregularly, and up the steps of one of these she ran, and pushed open the door.

"One of the maids used to sleep here," she said; "but after being twice frightened she begged for another room, and got it."

She jumped upon the mattress as she spoke, and holding the candle above her head, felt with trembling fingers for the spring in the wall that concealed the secret cupboard.

The narrow door of it swung back, and she thrust her right arm into the interior with a cry of impatient eagerness, that ended in one of joy as her hand struck against a roll of papers, upon which she seized.

"Here, take the candle!" she cried, thrusting it into Mr. Holt's hand, and with trembling fingers she began to untie the ribbon that bound the papers together. "It is a diary," she said, as she pressed out the sheets, "and there is a paper—see—in Edgar Booth's handwriting."

"She is saved," said Mr. Holt, in a triumphant, passionate voice that startled her; "it is Mr. Booth's confession, and here"—he struck with his forefinger a corner of the page, "is the signature of a witness, Jane Dowse."

"I had a kitchen-maid of that name," exclaimed Hetty.

"She left the day after Mr. Booth's death—I remember the date so easily because Frobig, my cook, wrote me that the girl seemed quite unhinged in mind after the catastrophe, and asked to be allowed to go home. But let us read it. Oh! Berry! Berry!" and down she sunk on the edge of the bed and wept aloud for very joy.

Now Chummy, who had awakened to find his consort missing, had, quite unlike the fashion of most husbands, taken the trouble to get up and go and look for her, and on peeping through the balustrade, had been somewhat taken aback at seeing her looking very like Ophelia, entertaining a man in his study.

He could not hear what they said, but, after getting into a dressing-gown, he had descended, and followed them at a safe distance upon their journey upstairs, wondering what this new prank of Hetty's might be, but with no feelings of jealousy whatever burning in his manly bosom.

So that when he appeared at the open door-way, it was to discover his wife in tears, and Mr. Holt in the act of transferring to his breast-pocket what looked like a slender roll of paper.

Hetty heard the steps and opened her drowned eyes to effect an introduction.

"Chummy," she said, "it is Mr. Holt; he was delayed on his way down, and I opened the door and let him in; and we have been looking for something we thought Berry might have hidden, and—we have *found* it!"

Chummy nodded, and looked happy.

"Shall I read it?" said Mr. Holt, and then Hetty saw that he had a single sheet of paper only in his hand, and she cried out:

"Where is the diary?"

"That belongs to Mrs. Booth," he said.

"But you will read it?" cried Hetty, jealously, and in a moment all her hatred and fear of the man returned, and she marveled that he could have held her under his spell, and compelled her to do his bidding during the past hour.

"I will read you Mr. Booth's confession," he said, and began at once.

It was dated on the night of his death, and ran thus:

"I am dying, and by my own hand. Half an hour ago I went into my wife's studio. She was not there, but on the table stood a bottle of prussic acid. An overmastering temptation to end the agonies I have lately endured overcame me. I carried the poison down to my bedroom, resolved that if my wife were not there I would take it. She was not there. I set the bottle on the table, and waited. Presently a step passed the door. I called out, asking who it was, and soon a stupid, idiotic face appeared in the door way. I bade the woman come in. She came slowly, and I then told her to sit down, and wait. She did so, just inside the door. She is sitting there now, as I write these lines.

* * * * * * *

"I wish to save my wife, the only woman whom I have ever loved in the world, the sight of my last hideous agonies from a disease that I know to be incurable. I am about to drink the poison in the presence of the woman who will witness this document.

* * * * * * *

"I have swallowed it. She has witnessed this paper, not having read a line of it. I have only now to sign this, and address it to my wife."

His signature was firm, and beneath it appeared, in laborious pot-hooks and hangers, the name of Jane Dowse.

While Mr. Holt was reading, sundry sounds of substantial ghosts moving about were heard, and, beyond the narrow circle of light made by the candle, dim faces might have been perceived peeping in at the door, while faint whispers stole abroad upon the air.

Hetty caught sight of one of those shadowy outlines, and beckoned it forward.

"Frobig!" she cried, "you remember Jane Dowse; did you know that she witnessed any paper for Mr. Booth the night he died?"

Frobig's modest voice alone answered the summons.

"No, ma'am," she said; "but after going upstairs that night she seemed very strange, and when the news came that the poor gentleman was murdered she seemed mad to get away, and she packed her box and went away early next morning without her wages."

"Have you got her address?" said Mr. Holt, addressing an invisible body.

"Yes, sir;" and she gave it.

Mr. Holt wrote it carefully down in his pocket-book.

Then he turned to Hetty.

"You have saved her," he said—"you, her best and truest friend."

"I say," said Chummy, surveying his wife's costume with looks of shame-faced misery, now that the excitement was past, "hadn't I better take Mr. Holt down, and see that he gets something to eat?"

"I have to find Jane Dowse to-night," said Mr. Holt; but when he would have bade his unwilling hostess good-night, she put her hands behind her and buttoned up her lips tight.

Yet when he had gone she began to understand why such a man should have obtained an ascendency, and kept it, over such a woman as Berry.

* * * * * * *

Mr. Holt had found Jane Dowse by morning, and taken down her reluctant evidence in the presence of witnesses. She said that on the night of Mr. Booth's death she passed his door, and, hearing him call out, she went in. He was sitting at a table, writing. She did not notice any bottle there until after she had waited, as he bade her, a few minutes, while he went on writing; then he poured something into a wine-glass, and immediately afterward asked her if she would sign her name in a corner of the paper upon which he had been writing. She did so, and he gave her a guinea. Directly she got outside the door she felt frightened at what she had done, for he looked like death, and she didn't know what she might have put her name to.

When she heard that he was dead, she was more frightened still, and rather than be dragged up by a policeman

to tell all she knew, resolved to go away, and did so next morning. When she found there was no hue and cry after her, she stopped quietly at home, and had been there ever since. She couldn't say why she had been such a fool as to sign it, but she pitied the poor gentleman, and she thought his wife was a bad woman to be carrying on with another gentleman when any one could see her husband was dying.

CHAPTER VIII.

"O! sweetest sweet, and fairest fair,
Of truth and worth beyond compare,
Thou art the cause of all my care,
Since first I loved thee!"

A MAN was sitting in a railway carriage, with a smoothed-out scroll of papers in his hand.

They were headed "My Confession," and ran thus:—

"I loved him at first sight—I love him now. I was no weak girl allowing myself to fall under his influence before we had exchanged a dozen words, nor was I a light woman ready to encourage the insolence of any man who deigned to admire and covet me. But I was not blind, and from the first I felt my danger. Afterward, when I met him oftener, his gentleness, his patience, the splendid quality of his intellect won my respect, and while I constantly took fresh delight in his company, my fear of him gradually subsided. Then there came a break in our companionship, for months I did not see him, but day and night I longed, I yearned for a sight of his face, for the sound of his voice. I knew then that it was not for his intellect, for his charm of manner I loved him, but for himself. One day, in a moment of madness, I wrote to him, and asked him to come and see me. He came. I knew that he loved me, and each day I admired more and more his reticence and self-control, for he must have

known that I loved him too. My love was profoundly selfish. It was as if I had said to him 'I do not care if you are happy—I do not care if you suffer—I only want to see you, to be near you, I want my joy all to myself, and you shall neither touch nor share it.' I was so proud that, like Craddock's wife, I could have put the magic mantle on, and it would not have done more than crinkle at the hem! I was exulting in my outward purity when at heart all was sin; but one day a punishment came. He kissed me. Oh! my God, shall I ever forget the shame, the outrage of that kiss—I felt as lost a creature as if I had deliberately dishonored my husband; it was as if an outward seal had been set to my inward vileness.

"I sunk down insensible at his feet. Three days later he called, and I saw him, and I forgave him. We went back to our old position toward each other, but it was not the same. The love that is always kept hungry is the keenest, the fiercest; yet it will sob and moan as piteously as any forsaken, starving child—and the elements of fierceness die out in the helpless longing, the unsatisfied moan—it is then that the greatest danger comes; it is the weakness that betrays—and it is then that temptation seizes and grips you with a giant's strength.

"I thought that out of sheer love for me he would not again cross the line that he knew to be marked between us; but one might as well try, with Canute, to stop the sea-waves, as to hold back the fully aroused passion of a man who knows his love is returned. So, just as I was growing happy again, he broke out.

"He had come up with me to my attic studio, and when he presently shut tne door behind him, a terrible feeling of fear, almost of physical fear, came over me.

"'We will go down now,' I said; but, as I passed him, he caught me in his arms. What does a man say at such a time as this? What does the woman say? Is she guilty because she only yields, stupefied, to the torrent of his

words, the iron strength of his embrace, while her lips are dumb and cold beneath the passion of his?

"I let him kiss me, I let him hold me in his arms—let those sins be written up against me at the Day of Judgment. I had not the strength of will or body to thrust him back. But for those few moments I have suffered, and shall suffer, an endless expiation. Thank God for this, that there was no touch of the brute in his nature, and he could forgive me even when I sent him from me.

"When he had gone away—ah! how many times did he come back to kiss my hands, my hair, the very folds of my dress, while I longed to take that dark head on my breast and forget everything save that we loved one another—I sat for hours, cold and tearless, a poor survivor of a great victory.

* * * * * * *

"My husband and I went to Ladisloes next day. The dreary change that had come over him of late grew darker there, but he denied that he was ill, and sat longer over his books day and night. For hours and hours together I wandered about the grounds; I stood in the dark to listen to the groans made by the ancient boughs as the wind caused them to creak against each other, and I looked for the ghost everywhere, inside the house and out, and never found her. I could not tempt my husband abroad; somehow, the sunny side of the world, the bright side that makes us love it, and our fellow-creatures and ourselves, had never been turned to him. He had walked so long in the shadow that he had got accustomed to its coldness and gloom, and he expected others to walk in it too, and never miss the light of day. All his thoughts were retrospective, all his habits were sedentary. Nature had no charms for him, he would turn from its utmost beauty to one of his books, and the dullest page of science was brighter to him than the most glorious one he could read out of doors, or in a human face.

"I said to him one day, 'Let me go out as house-maid or nurse for six months; this silence and solitude is kill-me.' I thought there was something strange in his look as he said, 'I shall not keep you here very long, and then you can go back to town or where you please.'

"If I had known then—but I did not. I only felt that in my hour of direst need I was alone, with no hand outstretched to save me. Perhaps the drop, the fall, from a keen intellectual life was too great; and the silence, the melancholy of the place, gradually brought me into that frame of mind when the idea of suicide woos you gently to your doom. That deadly restlessness had come over me, when the soul forever pursues the body, and will give it no peace; when the only remedy is pure hard work, leaving no time for thought, no cessation from toil, till the aching muscles force you into exhausted sleep—then to rise languidly at morning, muttering a prayer, then on, on with the blessed thought that night comes at last, and with it, peace.

"But that relief of work was denied me, and gradually, as my soul pressed more and more intolerably upon my body, I felt the lodging inadequate to it, and after a long and deadly struggle, the only escape possible to me occurred, and I seized upon it. For a time I was mad in the ecstasy of knowing such relief near at hand. I was blind to the awful crime to which my incurable passion had brought me. I walked on air, and with the tenderness of a mother who knows she must soon leave her wayward, unkind child, I sought my husband's company more, and as the coldness between us gradually broke down, I learned to know that lonely, proud, faithful heart as I had never known it before.

"'Do you suppose that I am blind?' he said, one day, 'that I have not felt the coldness of your kiss, long before you knew it yourself? You used to love me, but you do not love me now. If you creep into my arms it is for

safety, not from love.' And I could not answer him. I knew that the spontaniety of our love was gone, and that I could not bring it back. But when his kind arms closed around me, my sin against him pressed but the harder upon me. His had been the faithful heart—mine the exacting one. He had not known my needs, or he would have gratified them. In his solitude, in his greatness of soul, he had sufficed to himself; while *I*—what resources had I found? I felt like one who had silently registered sins against a man of which he is quite unconscious, and who had preserved his attitude of love and faithfulness toward me, while secretly I was a traitor. I remembered all the hard words I had spoken to him, all my sins of omission and commission came freshly to my mind. The thousand memories that bind a woman's heart to the only man who has ever won her, were drawn closer then; and I saw him only as the one whom I had preferred to all others, the man who had loved me with his whole strength always, though his habits and ways of thought accorded with mine so ill. I clung to the gaunt hand that each day grew thinner, as if it could save me from the abyss into which I was falling. But, as it chanced, it was from him that I got the last impetus which brought my meditated crime into a possible fact. I said to him one day, 'You do not seem to get any better —are you really ill?' Then he told me very quietly that for months, even years, he had been ill of an incurable complaint, and that he could not possibly live many weeks longer. No tears came to my eyes, no sob rose in my throat as I put my arms round his neck. I felt only that we were bound for the same haven, and that it mattered little which of us should reach it first to await the other. In those last days I got to understand how intrinsically good he was. He would not deliberately set to work to get another woman away from her husband, and if he were selfish, all his vices were home ones. I began to contrast

his patience, his reticence under mental and bodily suffering, with those brilliant qualities that I had admired in Hugo Holt; and gradually I felt myself passing from under the spell of a fascination that my judgment had never recognized, though my heart did. One evening I was wandering as usual in the grounds, and finding the door of the grapery open, I went aimlessly in. A step followed me: in a moment, before he spoke, before I saw him in the half-light, I knew that it was Hugo Holt. No matter what he said. I was taken by surprise, probably I had been half mad for weeks, and feeling that it was the last time I should ever behold him, I let him plead to me again as he had pleaded before. I even seemed to listen, and to admit the possibility of my guilt when I said 'I might—but I should kill myself after.' Howtyego heard the words, though I did not know it then. Did some devil enter my soul and urge, 'Your husband is dying, this man loves you—will love you always so long as you hold yourself out of his reach; then live, and gather up such poor scraps of happiness as remain to you'? But he whispered in vain, and when at last I had forced Hugo Holt away from me, my purpose was unaltered. That night I went to my husband and told him everything from the beginning, of my unfaith to him, of how my lips had been soiled by another man, of how I had loved that man, and, God forgive me, how I loved him still.

"He heard me in silence, as I told him, with my head bowed upon his knees; then he lifted me as if I had been a child, in his long thin arms, and held me on his breast. Oh! my dear! my love! how I loved him then! The last spark of unholy passion died out of my heart then, and the link that had bound me to Hugo Holt was broken. From that night I was seldom a minute out of my husband's company. I witnessed his agonies, I did all in my power to assuage them, and I came to know that, no matter how feeble and careless a husband's hold on you may be,

it is stronger in the end than a lover's most passionate grip of you.

"One day I went to London, and bought the poison. I meant to take it at about the time he died, whether before or after, I had not made up my mind. I believed then, and I believe now, that he would rather know me dead than left alone at the mercy of my own heart, and Hugo Holt.

* * * * * * *

"Oh, God! Oh, God! it is all over, and he is lying dead before me, slain by the poison that I had poured out for myself. Two hours ago I went to the room I use as studio, and looked at the bottle, smelt it, then, rehearsing what was to come later, I actually poured the acid out into a wine-glass, and lifted it to my lips. A strong shudder passed through me, and in one lightning moment I saw myself a *coward*, the basest thing in creation—all the principles of my youth, however blurred by my erring ways, rose sternly up in me—and I saw how by this last irreparable sin I was thrusting away the mercy that might yet be shown to me. I poured the poison back, and went out with uncovered head into the wild night—when I returned there was no longer any fear for me: the idea of suicide is one that, once thoroughly scourged and driven out of a human soul, never returns.

"I went straight to my husband's room. He was sitting with his head bowed forward, resting on the table. 'Ned,' I cried, and kneeled down beside him, and I lifted his weak arm, and twined it round my neck. As his head sunk on my shoulder, he tried to press his lips against my neck. 'Berry—my little Berry—' he said, faintly, and died.

* * * * * * *

"His sufferings are over; he is at rest at last. It was by my sin, by the unpardonable crime I had contemplated, he died; and, for that sin, I reckon myself his murderess,

and will die also. I shall fold his confession inside these pages, and then I shall hide them away. If they are found after my death, I entreat that they may be burned unread."

CHAPTER IX.

"O Helen fair, beyond compare!
I'll weave a garland of thy hair
Shall bind my heart for evermair,
Until the day I dee!"

THE door was shut upon them. For the last time in their lives, the two who had loved each other (though in such different degree) so unwisely and so passionately, were face to face.

She was standing as he had seen her stand months ago, her head against the wall, her arms hanging by her sides; she was as helpless, as much in his power now as then. Yet he could more easily have struck than have kissed her.

"You have found something," she said, "but it will not save me. I wrote it at Ladisloes. I woke up to find it gone, but I dreamed that I hid it in a cupboard in the haunted room—and since I knew you, I have taken to walking in my sleep. But you will give it to me" (and she held out her hand), "for it is mine."

"No," he said, "your husband's confession is not yours. It is in the hands of the Home Secretary, and you are a free woman."

She looked at him with eyes in which horror and pain struggled for the mastery; so might a man well-nigh frozen to death look at those who brought him back the agony of life when all he longed for was sleep.

"Free!" she said—"and for what?"

He stood silent, with no question in his heart of her

temptation now. Her purity had made his, and all that was best and most chivalrous in the man came up then, and his nature was a noble one, however hardened by the world.

Her mouth trembled.

"I called you respectable once," she said, "yet in the face of everything—believing me to be a guilty woman, you defended me."

He made no answer.

"And you did believe me guilty?"

"Yes."

"You thought that I had killed him—and for you?"

"I did."

"And you could *love* me still?"

"I shall love you always. You told me once that you would never belong to two men, and I knew that you loved me, not him."

"Yes," she said, "and I told you if I were a free woman, I would rather be your mistress than another man's wife. I was mad then—but I will expiate everything in the end."

He said, "You have still the best part of your life before you."

"Life!" she said, and shuddered, "and *he*—it was like betraying a helpless child who trusts you—he went out of the world lonely, deserted, and until I find him, I shall know no peace. When I told him that I loved you, he did not rail against you; he only said, 'I don't think he has behaved well;' but I know that if an effort of will could have saved *his* life, he would not have made it after he knew my unfaithfulness of heart toward him. And now, good-bye."

He did not stir as she held out both her hands. For a moment she looked at him, then with a sob of divine love, of pity, she pressed his head to her bosom, and closed her arms about his neck. Here was love, pure love, with no

touch of a baser instinct to deform it, and in those brief moments when his dark head rested on her breast, he felt all the honor that her love had bestowed on him. And then, for the first, last time in her life, she kissed him.

* * * * * * *

There is a woman living now in a far distant land, who, having taken up her cross, not sadly, but bravely, and with some of the past sunshine in her life in her face, is, perchance, for the one great sin of her youth forgiven.

And perhaps one of the least ignoble chapters in Hugo Holt's life is that in which a woman loved him, purely, wholly, and to her own most bitter loss.

In the midst of his crowded life, perhaps he remembers her. When the work and enjoyment of the day are done, I think that a dumb and gentle shadow steals to his side, and bides awhile with him, and her name is Berry—and that sometimes with locked doors he draws from a secret place some pages upon which the ink is changing color, but which are stamped undyingly with a love that nothing on earth or in heaven can break.

THE END.

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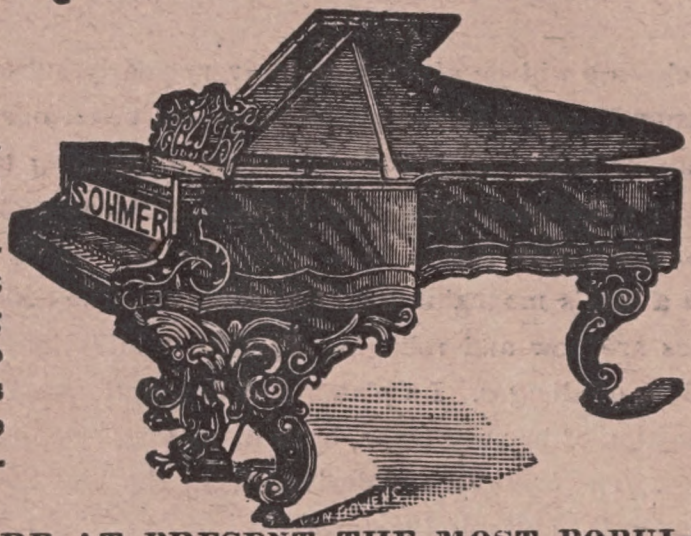

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